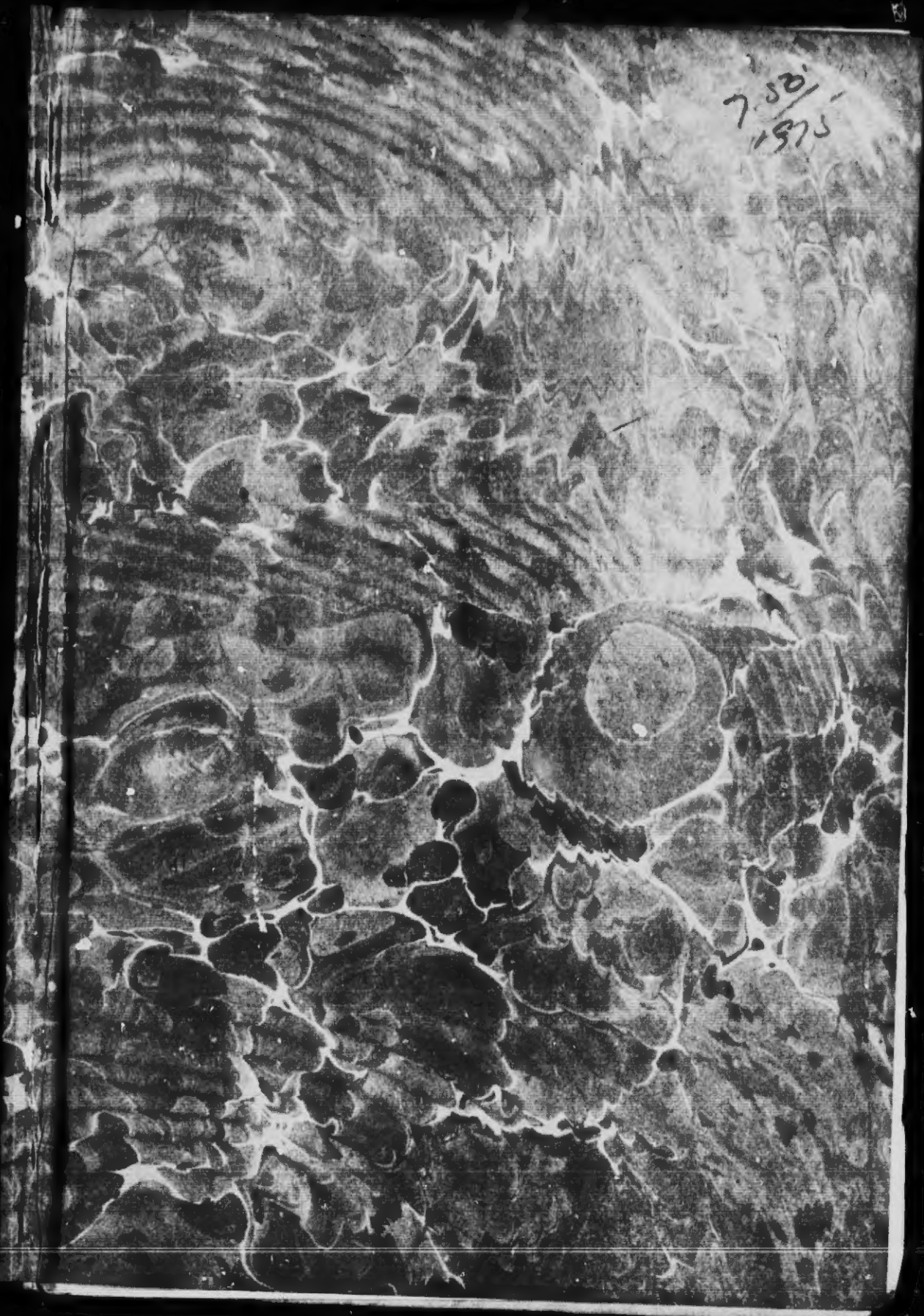


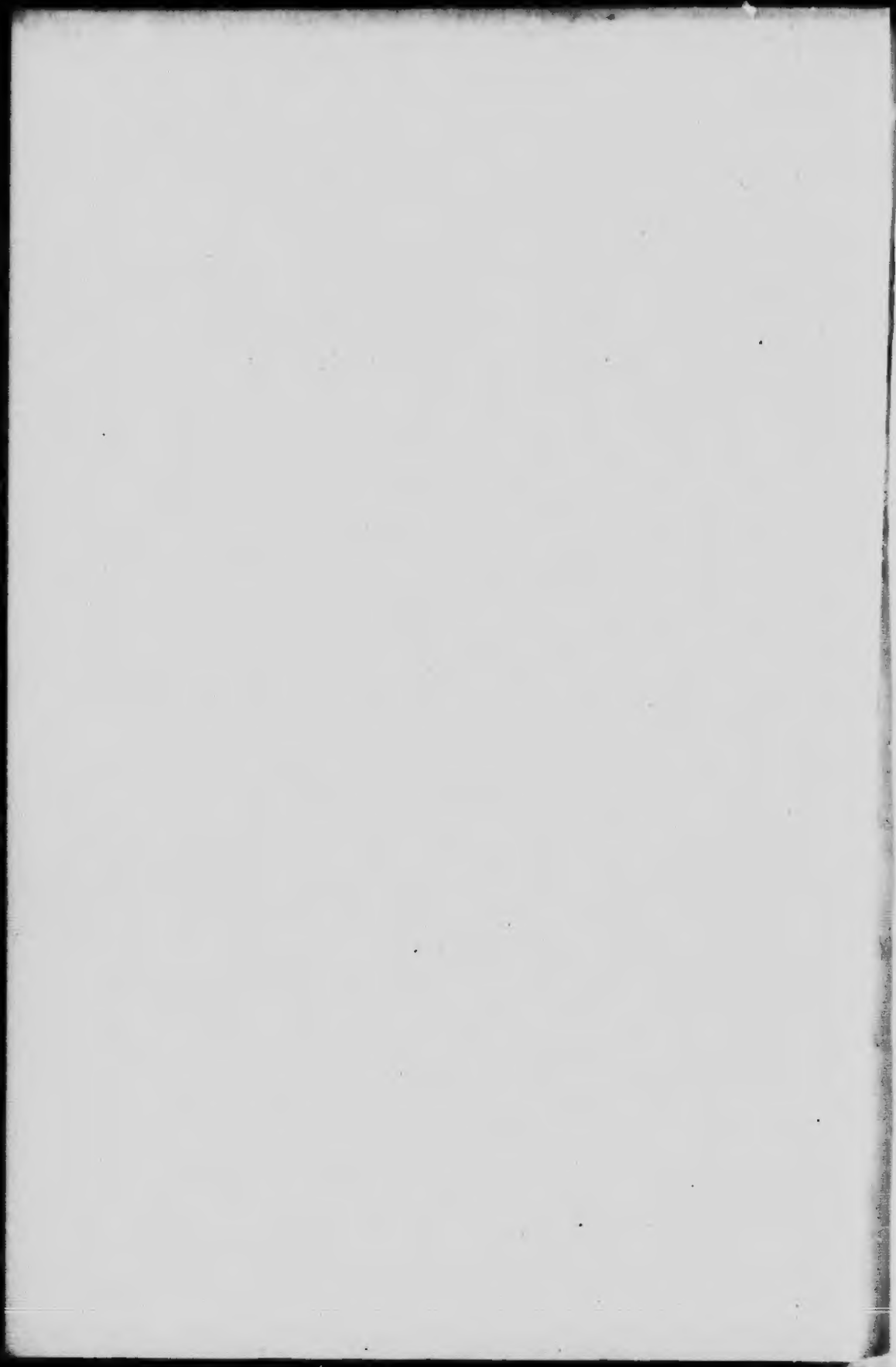
HIDDEN IN CANADIAN WILDS



JOHN MACKIE

7.50/-
1975







JIM IS MADE A PRISONER.

HIDDEN IN CANADIAN WILDS

BY

JOHN MACKIE

AUTHOR OF

"THE HEART OF THE PRAIRIE," "THE RISING OF THE RED MAN,"
"THE LIFE ADVENTUROUS," "BLACK MAN'S ROCK,"
"THE TREASURE HUNTERS," ETC. ETC.

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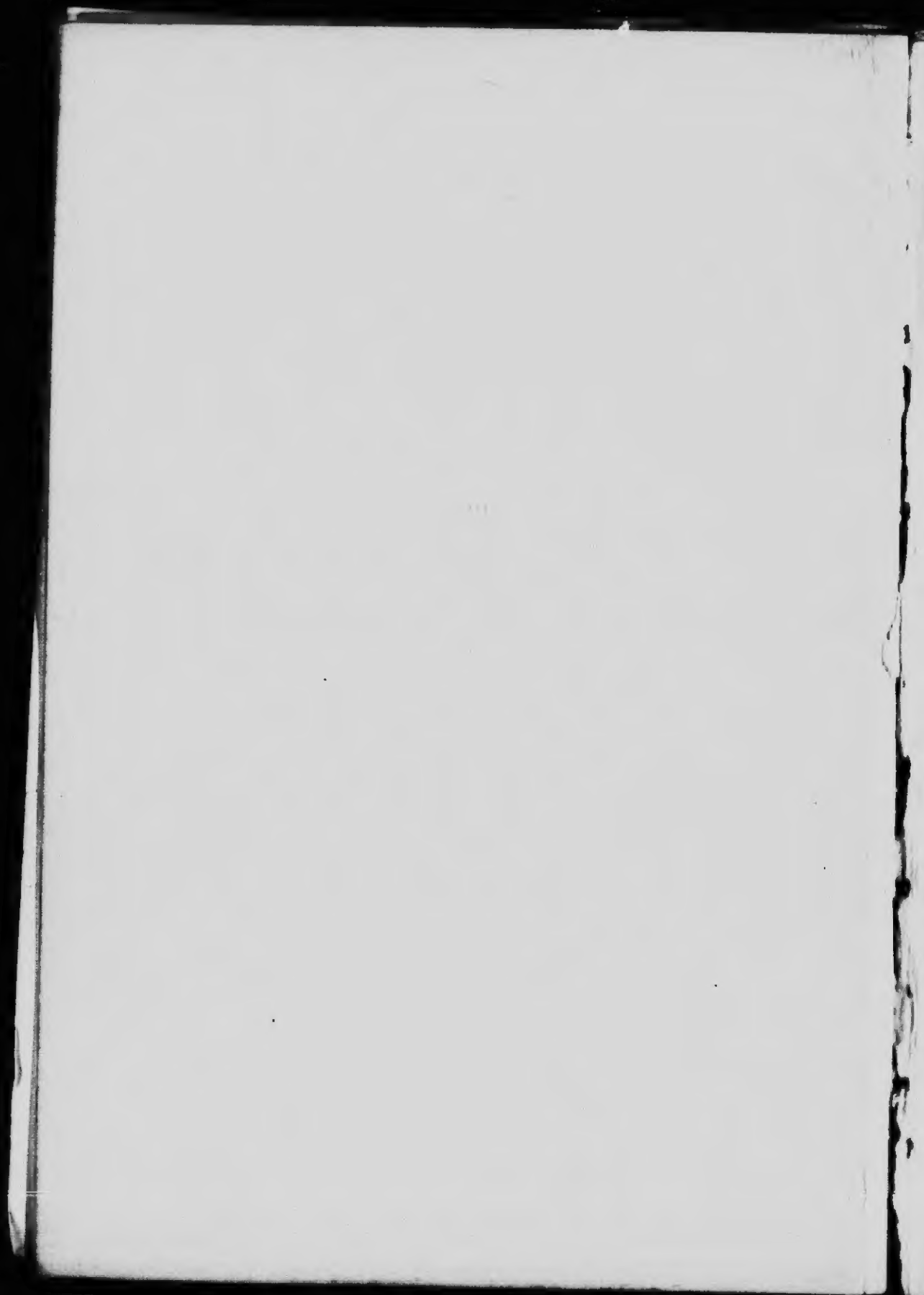
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TO
MY FRIENDS
MR. & MRS. FREDERICK WATSON



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HIDDEN IN CANADIAN WILDS

CHAPTER I

"IT'S AN ILL WIND—"

"FOUR boys and three girls," said Mr. Thorne meditatively; "and how one is to find openings for them all these days is rather a puzzle."

"Ted," said Mrs. Thorne, with cheerful remonstrance, "one would imagine to hear you speak that you actually meant it! As for the girls, in my time they would have had to mope and endure genteel poverty at home; nowadays there are many things open to them, and, despite what grumblers say, I am certain that they are happier working. Anyhow, they have no time for imaginary troubles, which are really more wearing than real ones."

"I wish what Jim's master told me about him to-day was only imaginary," observed Mr. Thorne soberly. "I suppose one is sensitive about one's eldest son."

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"He's only been in his present employment six months," was the unruffled comment. "One good sign about the boy is that if he is not getting along as well as he might, he doesn't come home finding fault with his work and abusing those above him."

"I'm afraid, however, he'll never make a business man," persisted Mr. Thorne, with an odd hesitancy. "Mr. Fox, the head salesman, told me he had quixotic ideas about what he called 'poaching on another man's ground, and violating the etiquette of the road.' As Fox said, he was afraid Jim lacked initiative."

"If having initiative means being like Mr. Fox," observed Mrs. Thorne with a somewhat surprising degree of warmth for so good-natured a woman, "then I hope Jim will be a failure. I understand this Fox takes advantage of his position to practically annex the accounts of his juniors. Apart from the morality of the thing, it is wretched policy. The man who robs Peter to pay Paul is going to rob Paul, too, if ever he gets the chance."

"I believe you're right, my dear," said Mr. Thorne, with the air of one not altogether convinced against his will.

"One need not be a business man or woman

to realise the truth of that," quietly commented his wife.

"My own business, unfortunately, is not good enough, or I would take him into it," continued Mr. Thorne, after a somewhat long pause. "It has been on the down grade for some years, and isn't likely to improve—thanks to the Continent flooding our markets. But I'm not saying whose fault that is."

It was early in May, and in the Thornes' fairly large and well-tended garden at Pinner the twilight was deepening. There are few great cities in the world that can furnish such a number of really charming and quiet country spots within a comparatively easy run by rail as the greatest of them all—London.

"Jim is just seventeen, and a big, strong fellow for his age," continued Mr. Thorne somewhat awkwardly, as he and his wife paced the modest stretch of lawn together; "and I've often thought that, in these days when so many young fellows have got to go abroad, he is the best suited of our boys to tackle the Dominions over seas."

Mrs. Thorne stopped short in her walk and gazed into her husband's face.

"Ted," she said, with a woman's instinct, "you are leading up to something. There is news of

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a disagreeable nature you've been keeping from me. I saw trouble on your face when you first came home, but I tried not to see it. You've got some project concerning Jim, and it is the Colonies. Don't keep me in suspense, Ted. Tell me all about it. Where is Jim, and why is he late to-night?"

Mr. Thorne also stopped and regarded his wife anxiously. The latter thought that she had never before seen her husband look his fifty-five years. But Mr. Thorne pulled himself together, and now that the ice was broken, prepared to impart the first piece of news to her that, in the whole course of their married life, he dreaded doing.

"My dear," he said, "I've been rather foolish over this affair, and, after all, it's quite a coincidence, and I don't know but that we should consider it a piece of good luck. I had a letter this morning from my brother John in Canada. He wants one of the boys to go out to him. I showed it to Jim in the City this forenoon, and I suppose it made him rather inattentive over his duties, for—well, to be plain with you, Margaret, he's got to leave the office, and it's perhaps the best thing that could have happened, and may be the turning——"

And for once in his life at least Mr. Thorne

"IT'S AN ILL WIND—"

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realised the utter futility of speech when there is a questionable piece of news that will not stand bolstering. He hurried through with it, and drew a letter from his pocket.

"We can trust Jim, my dear, to tell us the truth about the affair at the office," he continued. "I don't want to make excuses for him, but I really believe that, after all, that fellow Fox is a pretty trying man to have to serve under. Now, here's the letter from John. I haven't seen him, you know, these last ten years. He was always different from most people—one capable of long and hard spells of work at times, then all at once throwing everything away in the pursuit of some wild-goose scheme. He is the sort of man that either becomes a millionaire or dies a beggar. At the same time, he is one of the best-hearted fellows breathing. You know, my dear, whose little present enabled us to complete the purchase for this ground and to build our house?"

"Yes, something like a brother!" said Mrs. Thorne warmly. "I hope some day to be able to thank him personally. But read the letter, Ted."

They sat down together on a rustic seat placed against a delightful old hedge, and Mr. Thorne,

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spreading out the letter, began to read. Part of it ran thus:—

“If you have a boy or boys a little like what I once was—just a trifle restive or strange in harness, but anxious to get on—send him or them out here at once, and I’ll do my level best to give them a good show. There’s no one else, you know, Ted. I own a good-sized ranch, and over three thousand head of stock. I’ve also got my eye on something that there is more money in than any hundred ranches in Canada. You’ve often laughed at my schemes, but I’ve really struck oil this time. I’ll say no more on paper, for I haven’t just had my rights confirmed yet, and there’s a slick adventurer prowling around for something to jump. Should you only have one boy old enough to send out, let him bring a chum with him who will do him credit. He will be company for the lad, and I will give him a start, too.

“I enclose five hundred dollars for their passage money, &c. Don’t let them take out any fancy clothes. Let me know when to expect them. The first boat after you receive this won’t be any too soon.

“P.S.—I have a partner, named Joseph Red-

fish, to the extent of one-fourth share in the cattle, but I'm exercising my right and buying him out. I've discovered he's not running str ight, and I don't know what game he might not be up to if he gets wind of the racket. To tell the truth, I haven't quite fancied his ways of late, though I believe he's a coward at heart. He is not going to cut into what has cost me thousands of dollars while he would not venture a cent. He's one of the clever ones that wants to chip in after another has done all the hard work."

When Mr. Thorne had finished there was an ominous pause for a minute or two, and somehow the husband was diffident about looking at his wife. He had contrived to get the other members of the family out of the way so that during this, to them, momentous interview there should be no interruption. It was one of those red-letter interviews that decide and shape for weal or woe family histories.

"Ted," said Mrs. Thorne, "you know what we would have wished—to have kept our children as long as we could about us. But, of course, it is their eventual good we must think of, and not what we would have liked. Here is Jim. Let him speak for himself."

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Bare-headed, and with a somewhat subdued manner, Jim came straight towards them across the lawn. He was of average height for his years, and well set up. But what was of more importance than any physical fitness, there was a frank, unabashed expression on his wholesome Anglo-Celtic face that betokened a nature sane and healthy. He stood before his mother.

"Mother," he said, "I know father has just been telling you I have left the office for good—in fact, I had to go. I may be a fool according to Mr. Froe's estimate, but I've done nothing to be ashamed of. You don't think I did, do you, mother?"

There was no need for words, and the few that were uttered might have easily been dispensed with. It was also quite evident that Jim Thorne was one of those who would have kissed his mother just as readily before the eyes of his school and college as he did with only his father looking on in that quiet garden at Pinner.

"Now, mother," he said, "I knew I could count upon you all to believe in me. Let's leave an unpleasant subject alone. Perhaps my having to leave the office has only helped us to decide on what ought to be a really good opening. After all, Canada is not so very far away, and there is my

uncle John. And, father, I've spoken to Peter Dick. He hasn't any one to help him, you know, and he simply jumped at the chance of coming with me. He'll be here in half-an-hour with his guardian to talk over matters. Don't look so serious, mother; I even feel grateful to Mr. Fox for having helped me to decide matters."

CHAPTER II

A FACER

IN the all too brief week of active and almost feverish preparation that followed the receipt of John Thorne's letter, it may be safely said that never once did Jim or Peter Dick, in their attitude to those around them, give themselves any cause for after regret. It had all been arranged that the two lads were to proceed by the *Tunisian* to Montreal, and from thence by rail to Battleford, then by road to Pasqua on the Saskatchewan.

As for Peter Dick, who had just left school and was about a year younger than Jim, his delight at being enabled to accompany the friend he had such an affection and admiration for could hardly be kept within bounds. The two lads, in a way, were a contrast, Jim being one of few words and of a thoughtful and practical turn of mind, and Peter Dick, who somehow objected to the good old name of Peter in conjunction with the Dick, being somewhat impulsive in both speech and action, though generous to a fault and of a loyal and

affectionate nature. In one thing were they alike—neither of them lacked the attribute of courage.

It was doubtless wise that, when once it was decided that the boys should go, every preparation to facilitate their journey was made without delay. Their passages were taken, and a letter sent to John Thorne by the out-going mail, acquainting him with their intended movements. Mr. and Mrs. Thorne wisely determined that it would be a mistake to take any of Jim's younger brothers away from school in order that they might share in their elder brother's probable good fortune. They would finish their education first, and then, if things in Canada proved satisfactory, one or two of them might join him later. Betty, Jim's sister and next to him in age, made quite an ado because her parents would not hear of her accompanying the boys.

As Mr. Thorne often laughingly declared, Betty should have been a boy. But, so far as appearances went, she was not in the slightest degree like one. Indeed, as every one said, she was a typical English girl and womanly to a degree—which, all the same, had never prevented her becoming an expert climber of trees and a very fair cricketer. She said she was sure her uncle

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John must require some one to keep house for him; but perhaps the most powerful argument she used with her mother was her assertion that Jim and the others would have to go buttonless and in rags unless she went with them. Jim only consoled her by promising to send for her later if things prospered with him, and their particular part of Saskatchewan was found at all habitable for ladies.

The less said about the leave-taking, and the first part of the passage across the Atlantic, the better. The weather for the first few days was very rough, and Jim, who had previously thought that surely an undue fuss was made about seasickness, came to the conclusion that Columbus and the early navigators must have been far greater heroes than people generally supposed, seeing they must have suffered in an unimaginable fashion in their cockle-shells of boats. As for Peter Dick, he averred that once upon a time it was doubtless intended the different peoples on the earth should stick to their own countries, and so sea-sickness was specially created to thwart dreams of Empire and the growing propensity to wander. He reflected sadly it had all been of no avail. Peter Dick was very bad indeed. Doubtless, however, the sea-sickness helped to

divert their minds from the still more deadly home-sickness.

But when the weather moderated, and the sea-sickness left them, they became anxious as to the victualling of the ship—their appetites were so enormous. For the first time in their lives they were actually ashamed of them. Owing to the unusually large number of passengers there were two tables, the saloon not being large enough to hold them all at one time. With praiseworthy thoughtfulness for the prejudices of their less fortunate fellow-voyagers whom even the excellent menu could not tempt, they conceived the happy idea of attending and keeping their seats when the first table was supposed to have been served, and bravely continuing operations with the second. The tip they bestowed upon their table-steward was considered the best investment they had ever made in their lives.

There was deck quoits and even cricket, and when at last they entered the mighty St. Lawrence River, and gazed with something approaching awe upon the stern grey fringe of old Lawrentian rock where that vast romantic land of mountain and pine and rolling prairies dips at last into the sea, they were almost inclined to wish that the voyage could have been prolonged indefinitely.

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Sea-sickness had surely been only a cunning device of nature to give them a fresh lease of life, so fit did they feel.

Then picturesque Quebec with its old-world air, its beetling citadel, its gilded steeples, and memories of Jacques Cartier and Wolfe and the Plains of Abraham. There was something to stir the blood in the very sight and thought of it all. And then the vast, swiftly flowing river, along the wooded banks of which clustered the pretty, home-like villages of the French *habitant*. Then princely Montreal, stretching from the thronged wharves across the noble level, and brodering with stately public buildings and residences the base and slopes of Mount Royal itself. Greater Britain! To realise what that means, one must surely go and see—the normal imagination has its limits.

From Montreal to Winnipeg by rail, and from what seemed the giddy summit of a precipice more than one glimpse of that vast, placid expanse of inland sea upon which Hiawatha sailed—great Lake Superior. The large and comfortable cars hurried them on and across what seemed to be interminable pine-clad hills, alongside countless chains of gleaming lakes. Then Winnipeg, the vigorous Prairie city in the Red River valley, with romantic memories of the old French *voyageurs*

of the Hudson Bay Company, of Louis Riel and Sir Garnet Wolseley, rising up before one's eyes at the sight of the old gateway of Fort Garry that still looks down the twentieth-century street. And then seemingly interminable prairies that go on and on to where earth and sky seem to meet. To Jim and Peter Dick it was all an educative process that compressed the far-reaching history of centuries into a few hours.

Another day and night in the comfortable corridor cars, and then a change of trains into a side line running north. Then Battleford; then quite a long stage journey along the rugged brink of the North Saskatchewan River. The country was getting wilder and the signs of settlement fewer and farther between. By this time the boys were becoming not a little tired of the continuous movement and the long nights of imperfect rest. It was with no slight curiosity and eagerness that Jim looked forward to meeting that uncle whom he had never seen, but whose portrait had always given him the impression of a kindly, stalwart man possessed of considerable individuality.

When they reached Pasqua, a straggling and obviously newly erected village nestling in a bend of the great river and surrounded by great, dun-

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coloured, rolling hills, they alighted at the weather-board inn with considerable suppressed excitement. They carried their luggage to a species of shed hard by, obviously used for that purpose. There were signs of bustle and unwonted life everywhere, and the boys had heard on the road up that the oil discoveries were of the greatest commercial importance to the country, and the settling of the same might reasonably be expected to go ahead by leaps and bounds. The boys had been reticent to their fellow-passengers as to their identity and intentions.

But there was no John Thorne there to meet them. They waited until the landlord of the inn was disengaged, then asked him civilly if he could direct them to Mr. Thorne's ranch.

The innkeeper stared at them curiously.

"May I ask who you are?" he inquired civilly enough.

"I am his nephew," replied Jim, "and this is my friend. We have come out from England to Mr. Thorne."

The landlord regarded them very soberly, and gave a low whistle of astonishment.

"Haven't you heard?" he asked enigmatically. "You don't mean to say you haven't even read the *Winnipeg Free Press*!"

He paused again, and looked them up and down in a speculative fashion.

As if he had arrived at some conclusion, he said:

"I see you haven't heard. If you go up to the ranch there, you'll see Mr. Redfish—Mr. Thorne was his partner at one time. He'll tell you all about it, and I guess he knows most. If you come back here I'll give you dinner." There was a hint of pity in his manner.

Puzzled and oppressed with a vague sense of there being something wrong, the boys, with a few words of thanks to the landlord, ascended the rise some few hundred yards away, and approached the long, rambling log buildings indicated. Some few hundred yards from them there were unwonted signs of activity. There were wagons drawn up loaded with machinery, and men moving busily about. At the door of the main building a tall, red-whiskered man lounged with his hands behind his back supporting his coat-tails. He eyed them coldly. Jim approached and asked if Mr. Thorne was about. As he did so, the extremely strong resemblance this stranger bore to his late superior Mr. Fox so startled him that, doubtless, his bewilderment was incomprehensible to the questioned one. It was obviously resented.

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"What's the matter with you?" he asked.
"Never seen a gentleman before?"

Jim apologised, and repeated his question.

"Well," said the man of somewhat showy appearance, "I thought that every one in Canada had heard about John Thorne by this time. Are you 'tocs from the Ottawa Scotland-Yard, or what are you?"

Despite the irony of the words, there was annoyance and uneasiness in the speaker's eyes for a moment. Instinctively the boys realised that this impudent, showy man who stood grinning and showing his teeth before them was John Thorne's partner Redfish, and that he was a villain.

"My name is Thorne," said Jim, with difficulty keeping cool. "I am Mr. Thorne's nephew, and this is my friend Dick. My uncle sent for us, and here we are. Would you kindly tell us where we can find him?"

"Wish I could," said Mr. Redfish in a hard, cold voice, and glancing around with affected carelessness. "You see, it's a week now since he disappeared, leaving us to suppose he had drowned himself in the Saskatchewan River. I was his partner, and he got things into a confounded muddle. But I've struck oil and it's mine, and I intend to recoup myself for his wild-cat

schemes. I guess there's a tidy fortune in the oil business."

"Drowned!" exclaimed Jim, horror-stricken, when he could find his voice. "Do they say my uncle is drowned?"

"They do; but I wouldn't wonder if he skinned out across the border," said Mr. Redfish coolly. "He always was a bit of an ass was John Thorne—if you'll forgive me for making a personal remark."

And then Jim Thorne caught the cold glitter of the speaker's eyes, and he realised in a moment that he had to deal with a consummate scoundrel—that there was a great mystery, and more than likely foul play, connected with the disappearance of his uncle, which it was now his duty to clear up if he could. He was, indeed, face to face with possible tragedy.

CHAPTER III

REDFISH OVERREACHES HIMSELF

WHEN Jim Thorne heard in such a brutal fashion from Redfish that his uncle had in all probability come to a tragic end, the sense of stupefaction speedily gave way to one of intense sorrow. He thought of his father's grief when he came to hear of the news, and, doubtless, his consternation on realising that his son and Peter Dick were stranded in a remote part of the world with, in all probability, no one to help and advise them. About himself personally Jim did not trouble at all. With characteristic method he endeavoured to view all sides of the situation dispassionately before speaking.

As for Peter Dick, he saw how his friend suffered, and promptly took up the cudgels on his behalf.

"You've got a strange way of breaking such news," he said to Redfish. "If you think Mr. John Thorne has gone to the States as you say, why did you suggest drowning in such a brutal

REDFISH OVERREACHES HIMSELF 21

fashion? Whichever way it is, you don't seem to be particularly grieved."

An evil, ugly look flitted across Mr. Redfish's face as he listened to these words. He showed his teeth as he indulged in that dry, irritating grin which he doubtless realised was his most effective weapon.

"Oh, there's two of you in this venture, is there?" he exclaimed mockingly, and the nasal twang he imparted to his words seemed to make them all the more offensive; moreover, he dropped into the third person. "Poor chaps! they've come all the way from England to pick up a fortune from their rich uncle Johnnie, and now they find that the old buffer wasn't quite so clever as he imagined himself to be, and had to clear out. Well, I admit it is hard lines for you."

"I suppose you've got books and papers that can prove that this is the case," said Jim, suppressing the natural impulse to resent the insulting words lest the more prudent course should be lost sight of. "If, as it seems, you have profited by my uncle's disappearance, I don't think it is very good form of you to talk of him as you do. I suppose you are prepared to show things to us in black and white?"

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Redfish, like men of his stamp, was only in danger of losing his temper when he found his enemy was imperturbable. To find his enemy lose it put him on the best of terms with himself. It enabled him to use to really excellent effect the powerful weapon of sarcasm. To find that a mere boy was proof against the venom of his tongue annoyed him.

"How am I to know who you are?" he snapped. "Do you suppose that I'm going to explain my affairs to every Tom, Dick, and Harry who comes along with some cock-and-bull yarn such as yours?"

"Be careful," said Jim.

"Get out!" cried Redfish, raising his voice and speaking very quickly. "I've no time to waste talking to such as you—no matter who and what you are. I've explained to the magistrate here, who is an inspector of the Royal North-West Mounted Police and a J.P. and all the rest of it, and am ready when the right time comes, to give an account of things. I've got everything ship-shape and all O.K. You can bet your bottom dollar on that. I've got your precious uncle's signature to more than one little piece of paper, and duly witnessed to the bargain. I tell you everything's mine. Don't come worrying round

REDFISH OVERREACHES HIMSELF 23

here, but clear out as quick as your legs can carry you. Do you think I am an idiot?"

"I didn't before you lost your temper, but I've changed my mind," said Jim quietly, but growing visibly paler. He had motioned to Peter Dick to keep quiet.

Redfish was now anything but a dignified figure. He had completely lost his temper, and therefore his most effective weapon. His face was distorted with a variety of conflicting emotions. Having no small conceit of himself, and being a bully by nature, it irritated him, now that he felt he held the trump card, to be told such a plain truth by two apparently friendless boys.

"If you don't clear out of this, you two impostors or tramps or whatever the dickens you are, I'll set the dogs on you," he cried in a high-pitched, blustering voice.

"If the dogs are anything like you they must be beauties!" exclaimed Peter Dick disgustedly.

"Oh, this is too much—too much!" exclaimed the bully, fairly quivering with excitement. He turned round as if to look for something.

"I wouldn't if I were you," said Jim. "That sort of thing won't do you any good; and, anyhow,

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we're going now. You'll have an opportunity of explaining matters before many hours."

"Oh, get out, clear out, you baggage!" cried Redfish; and then, as ill-luck would have it for him, he caught up a long stick placed by some horse-driver against the wall, and gave Jim an admonitory poke in the ribs with it.

In less time than it takes to write it, the nimble and sturdy Peter Dick had sprung upon Redfish like a tiger-cat, and given him such a blow on the side of the head that Mr. Redfish's jaws clicked together like castanets. Reeling backwards, his head was brought into such violent contact with the wall that for the moment it was evident he did not know whether he was standing on his head or his heels.

"Come, Peter!" cried Jim, catching his chum by the coat-sleeve; "that's enough for him just now. He won't be so ready with his tongue and stick another time."

By this time several men had hurried up. The prospect of lively gratuitous entertainment had evidently put them on the best of terms with themselves. They also seemed bent on observing a strict neutrality, although it was obvious that sentiment was not in favour of the local champion.

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Peter Dick's face was flushed, and there was a very bright light in his eyes. His hands opened and shut convulsively.

"Come away, come away, Peter!" cried Jim, catching him by the arm and dragging him off. "That sort of thing is going to do us more harm than good."

Somewhat sullenly Peter proceeded to obey his friend, when all of a sudden there was a chorus of warning shouts from the onlookers. It was a lucky impulse that prompted Jim to pull his companion sideways as he wheeled him round. As it was, the billet of wood that Redfish had caught up and aimed at Peter Dick's averted head just missed it by the narrowest margin imaginable. The dangerous missile clattered to the ground.

"It's our turn now," cried Jim in a brisk and matter-of-fact way. "There's only one thing to do with a man who plays such tricks. Catch on to him, Peter, but look out for yourself. Into the creek with him!"

The onlookers grinned delightedly, and showed no disposition to interfere with the proceedings. As the boys advanced warily on Redfish, it was noted that the latter, whose face resembled that of a snarling dog, was not without a certain

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uneasiness. His assailants seemed unusually strong and active, and he might in all probability find them more difficult to handle than he had imagined.

Jim made a spring and caught him by the right wrist. Redfish swung his left fist round and gave his attacker a sounding smack on the ear. But Jim stuck to his man. Next moment Peter Dick had flung himself on Redfish also, and secured his left arm. The two boys pulled in opposite directions. Redfish struggled and kicked out for all he was worth, but the enemy stuck to him with bulldog pertinacity.

"Run him down the bank!" cried Jim.

The delighted spectators most obligingly left a clear road for them.

Once started on the run downhill, Redfish could not stay his progress, do what he liked. They reached the brink of the evidently deep pool.

"Now," cried Jim, panting somewhat and addressing Redfish, "you've got to pay for speaking of my uncle as you did. We'll let our side of the account stand over till another time.—Jerk him forward and let go, Peter."

In another minute Redfish took a header into the muddy pool, and the magnificent splash he made would have done credit to a lively young whale.

CHAPTER IV

A FRIEND IN NEED

It was a significant fact that although no one in the immediate neighbourhood of the summary ducking had come forward to prevent it, still, when Redfish in pitiful plight swam to the shore, two or three of the most disreputable-looking of the hangers-on went down to the water's edge and, with a considerable show of solicitude, gave him a hand out. One dirty and furtive-looking fellow picked up a thick stick and, with an ugly grin on his face, edged stealthily towards the boys. Jim saw the move, and turning, faced him. The fellow tried to look as if he was rather absent-minded.

In the meantime Redfish, dripping with the somewhat muddy water, scrambled up the bank. Beside himself with rage he approached the boys with clenched and upraised fists. Then, as if he had suddenly made up his mind to some desperate line of action, he turned and made towards the hut.

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"It's lead you want!" he cried.

Peter Dick, interpreting his words and action, was about to throw himself upon him again, when Jim stopped him.

"Leave him alone, Peter," he said quietly. "I'm told the Mounted Police never allow that sort of thing on this side the lines; and, anyhow, he's not the one to risk hanging when there's nothing to be gained by it."

Jim was quite right. Moreover, the mere mention of the word "hanging" had a salutary effect upon Redfish. He turned to the onlookers. It must have cost him an effort to appeal to them, but his pride was as nothing compared to the hate that inspired him.

"Can't any of you fellows lend a hand?" he cried sharply, glowering at them with wicked eyes. "You see there are two of them, and they're like eels with their tricks. I'd murder them if I started in."

"We thought you'd started, mister," remarked some one who did not happen to be in Redfish's employ.

But here there was a distraction. The furtive one before mentioned and a couple of other loafers, realising that the by no means popular owner of the new oil-wells would certainly mark

and pay them out for their passivity, immediately decided on prompt action, and closed on the two lads. Loafer Number One, afraid that his opportunity of distinguishing himself was about to be seized by some one else, made a sudden attack upon Jim with his stick.

But Jim had never once taken his eyes off him, so that, before the fellow could bring his weapon down, he found himself doubled up in a most unexpected and unaccountable fashion. For a minute or so he did not exactly know what had happened to him.

"Back-to-back, Peter!" cried Jim, "and don't let them get in upon you."

It was not an easy matter for two boys to keep three or four ruffians at bay, more particularly as the latter realised that, unless they served the boys as the boys had served the boss, they stood a very good chance of having their loafing and marauding privileges brought to an abrupt and inconvenient termination. The boys' methods had considerably surprised them, but surely grown men would be more than a match for striplings. Moreover, the attackers could avail themselves of cudgels and belts, and the lads were unarmed.

Redfish himself, in his dripping clothes, directed operations. He snatched a stick from the hands

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of one of his employees, and determined to have some personal satisfaction out of the matter. The ruffians closed in on either side and watched for an opportunity of getting in telling blows with the least possible risk of damage to themselves. The spectators appeared to be either delighted with the prospect of still further entertainment or indifferent as to the consequences of the unequal encounter.

It was serious business now. A coatless and unkempt individual promptly launched a blow with a fairly weighty fist at Jim's averted head. If he had only not been in quite so great a hurry to seize his opportunity, he ought to have stretched his victim senseless, and the fight would have been over. But he hit short, which—as every one knows, is an extremely awkward thing to do—so before he could recover himself, Jim, who had caught sight of him just in time, turned on his heel, put all his strength into a swinging right-hander, and landed the clever fellow such a telling smack right between the eyes that he went down like a smashed glass bottle. Moreover, Jim was just in time to recover himself and meet the attack which he knew was sure to come from his left flank while thus engaged. Still, he could not avert the smart blow he re-

ceived on the side of the head. It made him feel very queer indeed for a moment. Almost mechanically he swung round, and with all his remaining strength returned the compliment. Judging by the condition of Jim's damaged knuckles afterwards, it is more than likely that certain damage was done.

Meanwhile Peter Dick, with his back to Jim, was watching his own two ruffians, who seemed not a little amused to witness the business-like way in which he squared up to them. They were so certain of being able to make "cat's meat" of him, as they feelingly expressed it, that they lost much valuable time in beginning operations. It was only when Peter Dick cleverly dodged and actually grasped a cudgel aimed at his head, that they seemed to realise that the work they had undertaken really required their serious attention. They therefore started in right valiantly to annihilate the boys. Fists, clubs, and belts began to be used vigorously, and more than one hard knock, that showed on face and limb for days afterwards, was received in the *mêlée* that ensued.

The boys hit out with desperate courage, and the callous and sporting spectators encouraged them with divers caustic remarks. Doubtless

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their *amour propre* had been somewhat upset by seeing their worthy comrades receive such rough handling, otherwise it is only charitable to suppose some of the fairer-minded amongst them would have interfered. As it was, the end could not be far off. Jim, in turning aside to strike at one active young fellow who, with a considerable show of skill, was punishing Peter Dick, received a severe blow that made him stagger.

"Back to the river, Peter, and swim for it; I'll keep them busy here," said Jim hurriedly. Then, turning to his assailants—"You cowards! call yourselves men! If it takes five or six of you to fight two boys, I wonder how many it would take to fight a man!"

This was fuel to the fire, and with angry snarls the dirty ones redoubled their efforts. Then some one got in a telling blow at Peter Dick and brought him down on his knees.

"Clear out, Jim, for goodness' sake, and make for the river!" he cried. "There's no necessity for us both to catch it."

As might have been expected, Jim's only response to this was to strike out at his cowardly adversaries with redoubled zeal. But it was a forlorn hope, and the end seemed very near.

And then there came an interruption that turned the tables with a vengeance.

It was as if a species of cyclone had suddenly struck the attackers, for with amazing rapidity, and one after the other, they went down before mighty blows from fists that seemed to be everywhere at once. And then the boys saw that a huge man, with a round, glowing face and a truly remarkable agility for one of his size, was scattering the enemy with an ease and thoroughness that denoted previous experiences of the kind.

One sour-looking fellow aimed a terrific blow at his head with the butt-end of a heavy whip; but the big man sprang forward, caught the upraised arm, shook the stick from his grasp, and catching him by the neck, sent him with one great push right into the arms of another assailant. The two went down with a crash, and did not rise again. They either imagined themselves past rising, or thought they were safer where they lay.

In two minutes more the whole affair was over. The big man, with a broad smile on his face and his hands up in proper pugilistic style, stood in front of the boys, while he eyed the dispersing crowd in a way that gave one the idea that he saw something irresistibly funny in it.

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"Now then!" he cried quite pleasantly, "any more of you requiring change?"

But no one seemed to want any.

He caught sight of Redfish, and immediately his expression changed. He was about to say something, but checked himself. Turning to the boys, he asked them what all the trouble was about. In as few words as possible they told him. When they had finished he turned to the few remaining spectators.

"Any of you got anything more to say?" he asked sharply.

But they all seemed to have business elsewhere, and began to stroll away.

"Then the quicker you clear out the better, you cowards!" he cried after them. Turning to the boys, he said: "My name is Tapper—Timothy Tapper—and a jolly good name, too. You'd better come with me, and you can put yourselves to rights in my place. What you have told me has thrown light on something that has been puzzling me of late. I think if we had a little talk together it would help to clear up things."

CHAPTER V

MYSTERY

MR. TIMOTHY TAPPER, after a hasty inspection of Jim and Peter Dick, told them to come along with him, and led them off the field where they had so nearly come to grief. As they passed some of their late antagonists, it was obvious that these gentry had now so completely changed their attitude that they even seemed averse to looking at them at all lest they should offend their susceptibilities. As for Tapper, that simple-minded man, despite his modesty, did not fail to ascribe their changed demeanour to its proper cause. His face still wore its good-natured and benevolent expression; attributes which very big or brave men are providentially in a position to cultivate. At the same time, Mr. Tapper did not wait until he was out of hearing to express his opinions regarding them, and as he happened to have a voice so loud that it sounded more like a humanised foghorn than aught else, every one within a

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radius of at least a hundred yards had to listen to him whether they liked it or not.

"A wretched poor lot, these fellows!" he remarked, with a contemptuous smile, not unmixed with that most irritating quality of all—pity. "They put one in mind of a pack of cowardly curs; only let some stray dog get in their way, and immediately they all pile on to it."

The curs referred to visibly squirmed, and tried to look as if the reference did not apply to them.

Mr. Tapper led them past the piles of plant and machinery, the newly erected weather-board houses and corrugated iron buildings, the disused stockyard and primitive log cabins—all these side by side and in strange contrast. They came to a portion of the old-time half-breed village, where the dwellings stood on their own little plots and were fewer and farther between. The whole presented such an appearance as the great city of Winnipeg must have done when the then Colonel Wolseley saw it for the first time. Mr. Tapper approached a primitive-looking log cabin with a flat sod roof, and standing quite apart from the others. He pushed open the unlocked door—an ingenious construction of undressed slabs—and, with an air of proud proprietorship, bade them enter. The boys thought the dimensions of the tiny place

absurdly out of proportion to a man of the owner's size. Inside it was comfortable enough, and a model of order and cleanliness.

"Now, boys," said Mr. Tapper, "the talk can stand over till you've had something to eat. If you care to fix yourselves up a bit, I'll get some tea and a steak ready. There's nothing like tea and steak for building up mind and body."

The boys regarded their host's portly figure, and thought there must be something in it.

Within a remarkably short space of time they had attended to their bruises and put themselves to rights. They then sat down to a simple but excellent meal, and despite the fact that they were very considerably exercised over the serious turn things had taken, they did not fail to do full justice to it.

The meal over, Mr. Tapper lost no time in cleaning up and stowing away. He lit his pipe, and having been put in full possession of the circumstances that had led to the boys being there, and having read John Thorne's letter, folded his arms and spoke. His very first question seemed an odd one for such a seemingly simple man to ask.

"You're quite sure you're doing right in trusting me whom you have never seen before?" he

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asked. "I might be in league with Redfish or the others for all you know."

"You hit those fellows too hard for that," said Jim.

The big man nodded and seemed pleased.

"Yes," he said; "I don't think they'd have stood it."

And then he went on to tell them how, a few weeks ago, Redfish had given out in a casual sort of way that his partner—he always would talk largely of John Thorne as his partner—was about to take a trip to Montreal in order to buy plant and machinery for the new oil-wells which promised to be productive of such wealth. He had, moreover, doubtless through the instrumentality of several shady Western men who were hovering around, caused it to be circulated that John Thorne, by reason of foolish speculations, had seriously compromised their operations; so much so, indeed, that he, Redfish, had been obliged to privately raise money and take over his partner's interest as security. These tales having raised Mr. Tapper's suspicions, and he being on friendly terms with Mr. Thorne, had induced him to mention the matter to that gentleman. It was then that Mr. Thorne communicated to him the true state of affairs, and told him of his intentions

to get rid of Redfish, whom he had some very serious evidence against. That Mr. Thorne had taxed Redfish with his perfidy there could be little doubt, for there had been a stormy scene between the two. On the following day John Thorne had left the settlement, and Redfish had also disappeared. Moreover, three or four of Redfish's shady friends had also left. But as Redfish had told the Mounted Police that he and his partner were going east on urgent business, no suspicion was attached to their sudden departure. Within several days Redfish returned with the news that Mr. Thorne, by his mad speculations, had been obliged to surrender his interests to him, and that this, doubtless, having preyed upon his mind, had led him to disappear suddenly on the eve of his return to Pasqua.

At this point Mr. Tapper rose from his seat, saying he was going to have a look around, and went outside. The boys could hardly conceal their impatience, but they realised that in all probability their big friend had very good reason for his caution. In a few minutes Mr. Tapper returned, and resumed :

"There's been a chap who has been amusing me slightly prowling around these last few days," he said. "He is a curious sort of fellow. As I

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was out seeing to my horses the other day, some few miles from here, some one sent a bullet bang through my hat. I was in a little dip at the time, but I dodged, and up and caught the fellow on the hop. You never saw such a skeered chap as he was in all your life! 'My goodness!' he cried, 'I only see'd your hat and thought as how it was a jack-rabbit!' Now, I couldn't swear that he lied, so I gave him the benefit of the doubt. 'Friend,' I said, 'your imagination is something like your trigger-finger, a trifle fresh. If you take my advice you'll clear out of these parts, for if I think you're liable to make a mistake of that sort again, your head will be inside the hat when I fire.' So he cleared; but, all the same, I've seen that white wolf's face of his poking around, and I guess he's watching his chance to do business with me."

"Is he one of Redfish's friends, do you think?" asked Jim.

"I rather think he is," was the reply; "but, anyhow, he knows enough not to be seen with him."

"And what do you think became of my uncle?" asked Jim. "Do you suppose he is drowned?"

Timothy Tapper looked very grave, and folding his hands contemplatively, replied:

"Of course, I don't know for certain that he is not drowned; but if he is, I wouldn't mind betting that some one assisted him into the water."

"But haven't the Mounted Police been making inquiries about him?" asked Jim.

"Certainly. I went to the inspector in charge and told him what I thought, but I found Redfish had forestalled me and spun a nice old yarn. He, Redfish, showed him how Mr. Thorne had made a mess of things, as well as his signature attached to several papers, and as he took good care to have everything ship-shape, and there was no one to disprove him—indeed, he had two or three of those precious friends of his to back him up—I was told that although I had done quite right in communicating with the police, I had yet made a mistake. Redfish, the police magistrate said, was a most business-like and methodical man, and had books and papers to prove that Mr. Thorne was really in his debt, and that the latter, if he was not drowned, had every reason to wish that people might think so."

"But how do you reconcile my uncle's letter to us with what Redfish says?" asked Jim. "My uncle could hardly have got rid of his interest in the ranch in so short a time; and what proof is there of other speculations? Besides, I'm inclined

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to believe by his letter that he had bought Redfish completely out."

"I don't reconcile the turn things have taken with that letter and with what I honestly believe to be the real state of affairs," replied Mr. Tapper, bending forward and speaking very earnestly indeed. "And what's more, I've good reason to think that the whole affair is a daring scheme of Redfish's to get possession of your uncle's property; and he has got possession of it so far as I can see. And what is more, I'm of opinion that Redfish and his blackguard crew have either killed your uncle or hold him as a prisoner somewhere. I really cannot make up my mind as to what they may have done with him; there's so many things to be said on behalf of either theory."

CHAPTER VI

POINTS TO A GRIM CONSPIRACY

"DESPITE what I have told you, boys, you mustn't lose heart," said Timothy Tapper. "What we've got to do is to find out what has become of your uncle. It's a big contract, I admit, but I've two Indian friends called Big Head and Little Dog, who are wonderful chaps in their way, and they are out trying to find out things for me. They may return at any moment."

"But can't the Mounted Police help to find out for us?" asked Peter Dick.

"Redfish has been too clever for them," was the reply. "You see, he anticipated everything, and has arranged matters so that it looks as if he had nothing to gain by your uncle's disappearance—indeed, the reverse. Besides, the policy of the Mounted Police is always to run a dark horse—and quite right, too. We must go on our own in this matter, and try and get at the bottom of the mystery. Your uncle was a good friend to me on one occasion, and I'm going to help

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you see the affair through. Hello! here is some one."

They jumped to their feet on the sound of approaching footsteps. Next moment two Indians stood in the doorway. One was a tall, fine-looking man, with rather a haughty and consequential air; the other very short and of a decidedly shabby and indifferent appearance. The expression of the latter was, however, intelligent and shrewd.

"Hello! Big Head and Little Dog," exclaimed Mr. Tapper cordially. "I'm glad to see you. I hope you bring good news. You can speak out before these young men; the one is a nephew of our absent brother John Thorne, and the other is a comrade of his."

"Ough! ough!" exclaimed both Indians, and immediately shook hands with the two boys—Big Head with the air of some exalted personage who, while conscious of his condescension, is still desirous of making a good impression; and Little Dog like one who, while conscious of the fact that his personal appearance does not amount to much, is still aware of the truism that it is perhaps better to look of less consequence than one really is than be of less consequence than one looks.

"Big Head is pleased to meet the young men

who are of kin to our friend John Thorne," said Big Head, with the air of a Roman Emperor. "As John Thorne has himself said, it is a good thing to have a friend like Big Head."

"Ough! ough!" commented Little Dog sentimentously, "for then they will not be in danger of forgetting it."

There was a troubled expression on Big Head's face, and Mr. Tapper changed the subject.

"Did you find out where Mr. Redfish went to that time he was supposed to go south with John Thorne?" he asked of Little Dog; "and do you know if others went with them?"

"Yes," replied the Indian in a matter-of-fact way; "John Thorne and Redfish started out in a buggy to go south, but they could have gone no farther in it than Piapot's Crossing, ten miles from here, on the Saskatchewan River, for there it is a sure thing that they were met by horsemen who with them crossed to the north side. Big Head and I then followed their trail, which made a great half-circle, and went on towards the setting sun again—in the opposite direction to that in which they started out. For four days we followed the trail into the Bad Lands, and there they now are. We did not even sight them, for we were on foot, while they had horses, and we thought that, seeing

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John Thorne was alive, we would come back and tell you."

"I see," said Timothy Tapper. "You thought if you made up on them, and found that our friend John Thorne was a prisoner and you attempted to rescue him, they might put him to death?"

"That is so," said Little Dog dryly. "The ways of bad whites are even as those of bad Indians who love the fire and the stake. Besides, there were signs on the ground that, perhaps, even a clever white man might not read—that John Thorne was alive. We were not in a position to learn or do more. Besides, there were five of them and only two of us, and we knew their guns would be quicker and better than ours."

"You did wisely, my friends," said Mr. Tapper, visibly excited, but keeping himself well in hand. "If Redfish had made up his mind to kill John Thorne he would hardly have taken those other men into his confidence. I know for a certainty that, though Redfish is a scoundrel at heart, he is superstitious, and a coward; and while he would think twice before taking life with his own hands, he yet wouldn't object to others doing it for him. His blackleg friends know this, and they also know better than put themselves in

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his power. If they killed John Thorne for him, they realise he would hold a trump card, and he could deal with them as he liked—which would be scurvily, you can rest assured. There is no real honour amongst rogues, and so long as those rascals cannot trust each other John Thorne may be safe. Still, they may scheme to compass his death, and arrange it so that there will be no proof against any one."

Jim and Peter Dick were simply quivering with excitement, but up till now they had managed to refrain from interrupting the older and more experienced man as he questioned the Indians. That, after all, there should be a strong presumption that John Thorne was still alive, if a prisoner, was something that appeared to them almost too good to be true.

"Then, all we know is surely good enough to go upon," said Jim. "If the Mounted Police heard all that, they would take another view of the case. We must act."

"Quite so," observed Mr. Tapper; "but we'll have to do so with extreme caution. If the Redfish gang become aware that we are on their trail, they might take effectual means of disposing of John Thorne. If the Mounted Police move, it will be known at once, and his fate would be

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sealed. We must find him ourselves. We must make our preparations right away."

"But Redfish is back here," observed Peter Dick; "why can't we have him arrested on suspicion?"

"From what I have already said, the police won't risk it. At present, the presumption of deliberate motive on John Thorne's part for keeping out of the way is too strong. You, Big Head and Little Dog, will, I am sure, come with us on this trip. In the meantime Redfish has his spies about, and it won't do for us to be seen too much together. I must have another look around. That white-faced fellow who mistook my hat for a jack-rabbit the other day is somewhat on my nerves."

He rose, and in the very act of passing through the doorway, the ping of a rifle was heard from the adjoining timber, and, for the second time within a few days, Mr. Taper's hat went skimming gracefully into the air.

CHAPTER VII

INTO THE WILDERNESS

MR. TAPPER did not give his unseen foe time to take another shot at him. He backed into the hut so precipitately that he upset Big Head, who tumbled backwards into the owner's bunk, and seemed in no hurry to get up again.

"It's that white-faced wolf!" cried Tapper, picking up a rifle from the corner of the room and opening a back door. "Take your gun, Little Dog, and go round by the Blue Banks while I skirt the timber.—You say where you are, boys, until we come again. We'll have rifles for you before another day is out."

The moment he had ceased speaking, he was gone. As for Little Dog, he must have taken his rifle and cleared out immediately. The boys afterwards could not recall how or when he disappeared, so quick were his movements. So far as they themselves were concerned, it was hard lines to think they were obliged to remain inactive in the hut while Mr. Tapper and Little Dog were

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looking for the skulking assassin. That he was the wolf-faced stranger their friend had spoken about, and that he was an emissary of Redfish's, was fairly certain. Doubtless, Redfish knew that Timothy Tapper was on his trail, and therefore it was imperative to silence him. If, to begin with, Redfish had only meditated the kidnapping of John Thorne so that he could seize upon and realise his property, he had doubtless now found out that, once started on a career of crime, more desperate deeds were continually necessitated to cover up the others.

Only Mr. Tapper's express command not to leave the hut kept the boys there. The Indian Big Head, however, helped to distract their thoughts. He lay groaning on his back in the bunk.

"Are you badly hurt?" inquired the sympathetic Peter Dick anxiously.

The two boys went over to him.

"Close up killed!" exclaimed Big Head in a voice eminently calculated to express his desperate condition.

"In what place—where?" inquired the practical Jim.

It was obvious that Big Head had not taken the precaution to make up his mind as to the

exact spot from which a fatal issue might be apprehended. He shifted a wavering hand from one part of his body to another.

"Poor chap, he is bad!" said Peter Dick, with a world of sympathy in his voice.

"Oh, rubbish!" exclaimed Jim, who thought he could diagnose the case correctly. "You fell on the bed, Big Head. I saw you go down, and you can't be hurt. Pull yourself together, take your rifle, and go and help Mr. Tapper and Little Dog to find the man who fired that shot. Come, we'll assist you up.—Catch hold of him, Peter."

The two boys, despite the agonised groans of the big Red man, raised him into a sitting position, then hauled him off the bunk and placed him on his feet.

"Now you're quite all right again," said Jim. "You only thought you were hurt. Here is your rifle, Big Head. A great warrior like you should have no difficulty in catching the fellow who fired that shot. Go and find him."

But Big Head, when he recovered from his astonishment at finding himself on his legs again, declared that it was not likely that a great warrior like himself was going to leave the boys alone and unprotected. He swore he would stay there with them and fight, if need be, until the last drop

of blood in him ebbed away. He placed one hand on his breast dramatically, and then hurriedly shutting the door, reconnoitred through an almost invisible crack in the gable-end of the hut.

Peter Dick, who had always placed the noble Red man on a pedestal of romance, looked terribly disgusted. But Jim, who took a broader view of things, could not help laughing heartily. At the same time he felt sorry for Peter Dick.

"You mustn't think 'they are all like that," he said, pointing to Big Head who was making a great show of locating the enemy. "I daresay, in fair fight and with his blood up, he would be a very different fellow. Do you remember the man in *The Red Badge of Courage*?"

But Peter Dick did not care for problems.

A little later Mr. Tapper and Little Dog returned. They evidently had not been able to discover the would-be assassin. Little Dog looked at his stalwart and dapper comrade with an inscrutable expression on his wizened, irregular features.

"Big Head," he observed slowly and with marked courtesy, "your desire that others should have the glory of meeting the enemy is very touching."

Big Head looked uneasy, but he waved one

hand deprecatingly, as if to suggest that his virtues were being overrated, and that he could not help being self-sacrificing as it was second nature to him. Little Dog, after a significant pause, continued:

"Our brother Timothy and I have therefore thought that it would ill become us as self-respecting men to allow ourselves to be thrust forward at your expense. We therefore insist that you straightway take your rifle and travel up Black Plume gulch. It is more than likely that the bloodthirsty enemy lies concealed there. Find him, and when you have taken his scalp, return so that we may rejoice with you. We will start this night to find our brother John Thorne. In the meantime I go to get ready the canoes for our journey, while our brother Timothy and the young warriors will go fetch the necessary stores for them. We will see you later, Big Head; and forget not to keep your own counsel about our doings in the meantime."

The wizened, shabby little man fixed the tall, showily garbed warrior with an uncompromising eye, and indicated the back door.

At first Big Head did not seem to understand what was required of him; but Little Dog cleared his throat with marked deliberation, and knitted

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his brows, while his eyes wandered round the room as if in search of something. Without another word Big Head passed quickly through the doorway, and ran in a zigzag, crouching direction towards the timber.

"The unseen foeman will be very clever if he can get a shot at our brother Big Head," quietly observed Little Dog. "I know of no Indian who is more capable of taking good care of himself than he."

After all, like many more highly-strung temperaments, Big Head had an uncanny gift of anticipating the movements of an enemy. His seeming cowardice arose from a keen appreciation of dangers he could not see. He was in reality skilled in woodcraft, and capable of prolonged physical exertion when under the stimulating leadership of such as his insignificant comrade Little Dog. At the same time, it was his inordinate craving to be considered a brave and very important personage, while running as little risk as possible, that was continually rendering him ridiculous. He had, indeed, a very tender regard for the inviolability of his own person.

Big Head having gone, Mr. Tapper directed the boys to go back to the coach office and take such articles of clothing from their luggage as he

thought might be serviceable to them on their trip. They were to leave their baggage in a room there maintained for that purpose, but on no account were they to give any one the slightest hint as to their intended movements. Each of them was also to buy a certain amount of provisions from the stores, so that when Mr. Tapper ordered his the quantity would not be likely to suggest a prolonged trip. The boys duly did as they were told, while Mr. Tapper and Little Dog saw to the canoes. In the little settlement they found many of the spectators and even participants in the disturbance of the forenoon, anxious to enter into conversation with them ; but the boys did not desire their patronage now, and let them know it.

Late in the afternoon the two canoes, which were strong and shapely, were loaded up with provisions, baggage, ammunition, and the party was ready for a start. The boys had been provided with a couple of repeating rifles, and such strong and serviceable articles of clothing as were necessary for the voyage. Mr. Tapper, Peter Dick, and Big Head, who had duly returned from his fruitless search for the would-be assassin of the morning, got into one canoe, while Jim and Little Dog got into the other and smaller one. As the start was

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made at a point a mile or two above the settlement and in lee of a high wooded bank, no one had seemed to notice their movements. Fortunately, as both lads, like many more English boys, had learned to use the paddles on the lovely reaches and backwaters of English rivers, they gladly seized upon the paddles, and it was a delightful surprise to Mr. Tapper and the two Indians to find that those whom they expected would prove as useless as most new chums usually do, were quite as much at home in the canoes as they were themselves. It was the intention of the party only to paddle some four or five miles upstream, then camp for the night. This would ensure a good start on the morrow. Having been seen so recently in the settlement, no one would miss them that day, and this would help them to get clear away.

And now, seeing that the search party has started out, and in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of John Thorne's disappearance, it may be as well to go back some little time and relate what really happened to the missing man, as well as referring to some of the events that led up to it.

John Thorne had been in the Saskatchewan district since before the Riel Rebellion. He had

taken up grazing country and established a cattle and horse ranch. After long years of hard work he had begun to do fairly well, although he could by no means be called a rich man, until something happened that changed his worldly outlook.

He found traces of oil on his property. He then visited the oil-fields in the United States, and recognised the similarity of the natural conditions. He saw that with a little outlay of capital, and careful financing, he could make more money out of the development of the field than could possibly ever accrue from the working of the ranch. Still, in order to secure the full fruits of his long years of waiting, he realised he would have to keep the matter a secret from outsiders, who might just possibly be not over scrupulous in their methods of annexing other people's property. He would require to give his entire time to the new venture, and to do that he would have to get some one to manage the ranch. He could best do so by taking in a partner. He advertised for one, and it was then that Redfish presented himself.

To cut a long story short, Mr. Thorne discovered that Redfish had a very good idea as to how a ranch should be managed. He was, moreover, a good business man, and up-to-date in his

knowledge of market values. He was also active and energetic, and had come there with good credentials. As it was necessary for Mr. Thorne to retain a controlling interest in the ranch, a fourth share was offered the new-comer at an extremely moderate figure. The latter promptly closed with the offer. However, when it came to producing hard cash or its equivalent, it seemed that Redfish, through some ill-advised investment, could only produce a quite inconsiderable part of what was required.

It was then that Mr. Thorne realised that he had acted very simply in the matter. On the strength of Redfish's credentials he had believed in him, and had signed certain documents, at the same time reserving the right to buy him out within a certain period if he, Thorne, did not approve of the way in which the ranch was being conducted. By this time the boring plant, and the men whom he had engaged to work it, was on its way up. Mr. Thorne, not wishing to be too hard upon any one, gave Redfish time to pay the money.

As soon as certain documents were signed, it was wonderful how the hitherto respectful attitude of the new-comer changed. Although he had been distinctly told, and it had been clearly speci-

fied, that-in no other undertaking whatever was he to have any concern, he at once began to show more than mere curiosity or interest in regard to Mr. Thorne's boring ventures. The latter had sunk all his available money in these expensive operations, and it was not likely he was going to concede any part of them to one who had not had any hand in their discovery or risked a cent in their development. Of course, Mr. Thorne had told Redfish all that was necessary for him to know under the circumstances. Redfish had begun his duties on the ranch, and Mr. Thorne busied himself with his new work.

After some little time Mr. Thorne found it necessary to raise some more ready money to go on with, and asked his new partner if he could find the money due to him, as, from certain little signs, he was convinced that Redfish was possessed of cash, but for some reason or other was averse to parting with it. But the latter only returned evasive answers, and hung back. It now became obvious that the man was playing a waiting game and might become troublesome.

Still John Thorne did not press him, and hoped that he was mistaken in his surmises. He sank all his ready money in the boring operations. When Redfish demanded a half-share in the ranch

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without having paid a penny, Mr. Thorne pulled him up pretty sharply, for by this time the new partner had begun to show his real character. What steps the rancher would have taken in the matter were stopped by the striking of oil. He now realised that he was a rich man, and could command all the money he wanted. It was a little before this that he had sent for his nephew.

Doubtless, John Thorne's change of fortune should not have interfered with what was his obvious course—the getting rid of Redfish—under the circumstances. The latter, who had remarkable powers of obsession, but up till now had failed to gain the ascendancy over the rancher, now changed his tactics. He as good as intimated that, of course, the partnership between them did not end with the cattle and the ranch; he claimed a half-share in any oil or minerals discovered on it. This audacious proposition Mr. Thorne only considered an ill-timed joke in not particularly good taste.

About this time the rancher began to notice that several disreputable-looking men were hanging around Pasqua. He mentioned the matter to Redfish, but that individual only smiled and said that, seeing the district was shortly going to have a boom, it was only what might be expected.

It became necessary for John Thorne to go down east to Ottawa, and only because it required some one of authority on the ranch, and there was no other man available, he forbore to get rid of Redfish. It was about this time that the rancher made his great mistake; he should have packed the specious adventurer about his business there and then and at any cost. Still, he was perfectly open with him, and intimated that before long they must part company. Redfish maintained an ominous silence.

Next afternoon Mr. Thorne left the ranch in a buggy to make the railway at Battleford, some seventy miles distant. That evening he camped at a certain crossing some fifteen miles away. Next morning he was about to start out again when, to his surprise, Redfish, at the head of five of the sinister-looking fellows whose presence had been remarked about Pasqua, rode up.

The moment John Thorne saw Redfish, he realised that the mask had at last been dropped, and that he had now to deal with one whose methods were simply those of the brigands. Balked in his endeavours to bluff his benefactor out of a half-share in the ranch, Redfish had determined to coerce him.

"Thorne," he said impudently while the other

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ruffians closed around, "I think it's time for you to settle this business between us once and for all. I've no intention of allowing you to go away before you've signed a paper admitting that one-half of the oil discoveries belongs to me. I was a fool not to have had it all down in black and white long ago, but I always thought you were a man of honour, and didn't think it was necessary to be so very particular, seeing how we were associated together in the ranch. However, I must safeguard my own interests. So now, here's the paper, and you'll be good enough to sign."

The rancher was so taken aback at such brazen effrontery that for the moment he was incapable of thought or action. Redfish showed his knowledge of human nature when he sprung his surprise upon him in the way he did.

"Come now," he continued. "It's no use thinking how you're going to get out of this business. Indeed, don't imagine you're going to get out of it for one single moment. My friends and myself are prepared to see you don't."

"Redfish," said Thorne, "if this is an attempt at bluff I'd advise you to drop it. You are laying yourself open to a rather serious charge."

Redfish looked quite a respectable member of

society at that moment with his quiet and gentlemanly style of dress, and his assumption of indignation tempered with forbearance. Still, he must have known that he stood revealed as a consummate scoundrel.

"Once and for all, Thorne, I tell you to drop that tone," he said somewhat sharply. "You can take it from me you've got to sign a certain little document. To make trouble is silly. Don't do it, and sign."

He produced a writing-pad on which was a document for signature. He handed the rancher a fountain pen.

"You scoundrel!" cried Thorne, appalled at the boldness of his methods. "If ever a man was working for Stony Mountain Penitentiary it is you. Get out of my sight. I'm going back to the ranch to put the police in charge. I advise you to make yourself scarce."

But Redfish and his followers blocked the way.

"Seeing that's the line you take," he sneered, "you force us to be very plain with you. It amuses me to hear you talk about your ranch, when you know very well you've made it all over to me for the various sums I have lent you in order that you could stand your half-share in the

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oil-boring business. You don't deny that, do you?"

John Thorne was so amazed at such unparalleled effrontery that at first he was incapable of speech. Then, pulling himself together, he asked Redfish how he expected to prove such a preposterous assertion.

"I have got other papers with your signature attached," Redfish replied quietly. "Of course, if I've got to use them, it isn't likely we are going to allow you to go back to say as how the signatures aren't yours—you understand?"

"And in that case what are you going to tell them at Pasqua? And what do you propose doing?" asked Thorne, an odd curiosity possessing him for the moment.

"You're naturally very curious," was the reply. "Under the circumstances, I think you must admit we're dealing very considerately with you. As I've said, we don't intend allowing you to go back to raise a racket and make things unpleasant for us. What we are going to do with you will depend on whether you behave like a sensible man who realises that you are not quite clever enough to carry off the lion's share of the spoil, or whether you elect by your pig-headedness to lose everything. I give you fair warning.

It's no use your pretending not to foresee how all this must end. Come now, don't be a fool. Sign!"

He had made the situation clear in all truth. John Thorne was to be kidnapped or suppressed somehow—probably killed—if he did not at once sign away his rights to Redfish. But how could a man with any sense of right in him at all consent to such outrageous procedure? When the rancher thought how this man, to whom he had given every possible chance, was actually compassing his ruin and destruction to benefit himself, his anger welled up within him. And Redfish had as good as said that if he did not sign the document he referred to, he would himself forge his name to it! In fact, he had practically admitted that he had already forged his name to other documents. Thorne knew he was a clever penman, and he did not doubt his word for a moment. It was useless temporising. He must act.

He prepared to step into his buggy to drive away, but Redfish pushed in front of him.

"No, you don't," he said, grinning.

Then Thorne, who was a powerful man, suddenly hit out and caught Redfish right between the eyes. The up-to-date brigand was shot right

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across the buggy, and came down with such a clatter on the other side that those who looked on thought that either his neck or some of his bones must be broken. It was significant to note that although one or two of his seedy friends evinced alarm, the others seemed to derive no little entertainment from this unexpected development, though they took good care to disguise their real feelings before the unfortunate party when they ran round with a show of solicitude to pick him up.

Thorne sprang into the buggy to drive off, but two of the ruffians sprang to the horses' heads and held them. Next moment some one seized him from behind, he was pulled backwards, then flung to the ground with a force that practically rendered him insensible.

And here in the meantime we must leave the unfortunate rancher in the hands of Redfish and his gang, and return to Mr. Tapper, the boys, and the Indians, on their way to find out his whereabouts.

CHAPTER VIII

BREAKERS AHEAD

NATURALLY, having to paddle upstream their progress was somewhat slow. Little Dog and Jim led the way. At first the latter was somewhat at a loss to understand the erratic and changeable course pursued by Little Dog. That gentleman began by crossing the broad river and hugging the opposite bank where it was low and destitute of timber. Indeed, the boys remarked that, no matter how the current was, Little Dog invariably gave a wide berth to those parts of the shore where there was anything in the shape of cover. They rightly guessed this was the natural instinct of the Indian to avoid possible ambush. At times, indeed, they would cross the river without any apparent motive. The scenery on every side was very striking. There were great scarred banks clad with pine, with green, billowy, whale-backed downs or rolling prairie in the background, while every now and again the valley would open out and they would skirt a low and shallow meadow-

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like bottom. It seemed an ideal country for settlement, and the boys wondered how this great fertile land should have lain so long unoccupied by civilised man, while so many millions of human beings struggled for a bare existence in overcrowded Europe and even in Lower Canada.

The boys noticed that Timothy Tapper, before giving the signal to recross the river, would always sweep the banks with a powerful set of field-glasses. Indeed, a very sharp look-out was always kept. At first a few signs of human occupation in the shape of primitive log-buildings were met with, but soon these ceased, and the great land lay much as it must have done a thousand years before. Nature had worked on grand lines, with noble sweeps and curves, as if conscious of the practically illimitable space at her command. Another feature of this land was the silence of it—it was a silence that weighed on one like a nightmare.

The exercise and the novelty of the situation and surroundings had largely helped the boys for the time being to lose sight of the possible tragedy that lurked in the background. It was difficult to believe they had only a short time before been English schoolboys or worked in grubby City offices. To watch an Indian silhouetted against

an amethyst sky, and seated in the bow of a birch-bark canoe with paddle in air, was surely a very picturesque and romantic touch.

And then the brief twilight fell, and long dark shadows flecked the grey. It would be quite dark in half-an-hour or so. They were now several miles above the settlement. The unwonted exercise had given the boys an excellent appetite. It had also made them feel as if they could roll themselves in their blankets and go to sleep without troubling to take off their clothes. When they did camp at the narrow end of a long and open spit of land, practically surrounded by water, the boys could hardly understand why Mr. Tapper and the Indians had chosen such an apparently inhospitable and unsheltered resting-place for the night. But soon the camp-kettle was singing on the wood fire, and juicy steaks were grilling on the clean glowing charcoal, so the boys ceased to trouble about the extraordinary precautions taken by their companions. They did not know that Mr. Tapper and the Indians, rifle in hand, kept watch by turns all through that night on the rock overlooking their camping ground.

Next day was a repetition of the first, only Little Dog, when in the lead with his canoe and rounding a bend, suddenly laid down his paddle and picked

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up his rifle. There was a sharp ping, and one of a herd of black-tail deer, drinking at the water's edge, took a spring forward and dropped dead. That day they had juicy venison steaks for their midday meal, and the rest of the meat was carefully stowed away in the bow of the largest of the canoes for future use. Tea made in a billy or camp-kettle over a quick wood fire was a revelation to them. It developed fragrancy, and was something quite different from the stuff they used to call tea, made in an improperly heated and damp metal teapot and with water that had been boiling, perhaps, for ever so long before being used. Moreover, it seemed to them that they tasted bread for the first time in the form of flaky white scones done to a turn on the sweet, clean charcoal.

Mr. Tapper reckoned that on the following day they would leave the great river and ascend a tributary that led out of the wild and broken Bad Lands, which, he explained to the boys, was country not infrequently met with in North America, where Nature seemed to have amused herself by twisting and punching the clayey soil into all sorts of fantastic shapes, and painting them with colours that matched the rainbow.

Mr. Tapper also expected that within two days, if they had ordinary good fortune, they would be near the place where the kidnappers were supposed to have taken John Thorne. But, after all, the missing man had not actually been seen with them. He had certainly left Pasqua in the company of Redfish; after that no one had seen him, and when it came to a mere matter of identifying tracks one could not positively swear to them, nor yet would a judge convict on such evidence. Might it not be that John Thorne had left Redfish at the crossing and made his way south by himself? It was a big country, and there was nothing at all to prevent him doing so. It might be that Redfish, who had met his friends there by appointment so as to put other prospectors off the scent, circled and went into the Bad Lands to look for fresh discoveries. It was a comforting and stimulating thought to believe that John Thorne was still alive, but was it not likelier that he was dead? Would not the very fact of his being alive be a menace to the safety of the plotters?

One thing was very obvious: unless they got at the bottom of the mystery before many days, they might never clear it up at all; for the villains, after realising and dividing John Thorne's

estate, would be pretty certain to scatter to all ends of the earth.

That evening they camped on a grassy bottom about a couple of hundred yards from the base of a honeycombed cliff. In bygone ages the waters of the Saskatchewan had doubtless been of greater volume than they were now.

"We will first pitch our bell-tent," said Mr. Tapper to the boys, "and then have supper."

The big man noticed the puzzled look on Jim's face.

"You are wondering why we are pitching it to-night, when we did not do so last night?" he observed.

Jim admitted as much.

"Well, I daresay it's only right that you should know," explained Mr. Tapper; "but I hope you won't put yourself out about it. Last night we were rather too near the settlement for an enemy to adopt bold measures, so we didn't prepare for them as we will do to-night. You see, if Redfish knows we have gone to look for your uncle, he is certain to gather some of those cut-throats around him, and—well, he'll attempt to wipe us out. Now, I fancy I saw some fellows on horseback skirting one of those

hills to-day. If it was Redfish's party, the sooner we make them show their hand the better. They will have seen our tent by this time, and to-night they will doubtless attack it. We will take jolly good care not to be in it when they do so."

A light dawned upon the boys, and they realised the extremely dangerous nature of the quest they had embarked upon. Still, in justice to them be it said, it only served to determine them to pursue it to a successful issue.

When it grew dark they loaded up their canoes again with their belongings, and hid them in a little cove some few hundred yards farther upstream. Then, leaving the tent pitched, they went up to the honeycombed cliff, some two hundred yards distant, and lay down in a species of cave. From it they could just see the white canvas of the tent showing in a ghostly fashion through the gloom.

It was a weary vigil, for they all realised it would be dangerous to go to sleep. It must have been about midnight when the low voice of Little Dog roused the others from their drowsy state.

"Look!" he said; "four—five—six men crawling towards the point!"

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And there, surely enough, in the dim light shed by the slip of a moon in its last quarter, and by the starlight, they saw several dark bodies moving slowly over the low ground and closing on the tent.

CHAPTER IX

A SURPRISE ENCOUNTER

THE period immediately preceding an expected attack is generally much more trying than the attack itself. Indeed, the beginning of hostilities is often a positive relief. When the boys saw the dark objects in the dim light moving towards the tent, there could be no doubt about the correctness of Mr. Tapper's statement that Redfish and his myrmidons would stick at nothing to frustrate their efforts to find John Thorne. Once started on their criminal enterprise, the few murders necessary to cover their tracks, and secure their own safety, would be a matter of course. And now here they were engaging in assassins' work before their eyes. It would be intensely interesting to note their operations.

Mr. Tapper, of course, had taken good care that each of his party was properly armed with a serviceable magazine rifle, so that they were very well prepared to take their own part. At the same time, their main object was to discover

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and rescue John Thorne if alive, so if they took unnecessary risks, and any of them were rendered *hors de combat*, their chances of ultimate success would be reduced to a minimum. Besides, as Mr. Tapper had said, he had not embarked on the expedition merely to gratify a love of adventure.

"We've got to teach them a jolly good lesson," said Mr. Tapper, "and make them keep at a proper distance in the future. You see, the chances are that these chaps are only a sort of picket sent out to try and stop us going farther. We'll soon see how they intend to go about it."

To the boys, this being so suddenly confronted with grim and tragic possibilities was at first difficult to realise. It was the sort of thing they had read about, but no flight of the imagination had ever meant so much to them as did those black specks crawling towards the tent in the moonlight. This condition of mind, however, quickly passed away when they thought of what was at stake. Sentimental scruples were absurd when dealing with unscrupulous cut-throats. They even wondered why Timothy Tapper did not at once give the order to fire upon them. Already the black specks were becoming shadowy and indistinct. It would be impossible to take any sort of aim when the time did come. The

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suspense was very trying. Would nothing ever happen?

"Don't fire until I give the word," whispered Mr. Tapper.

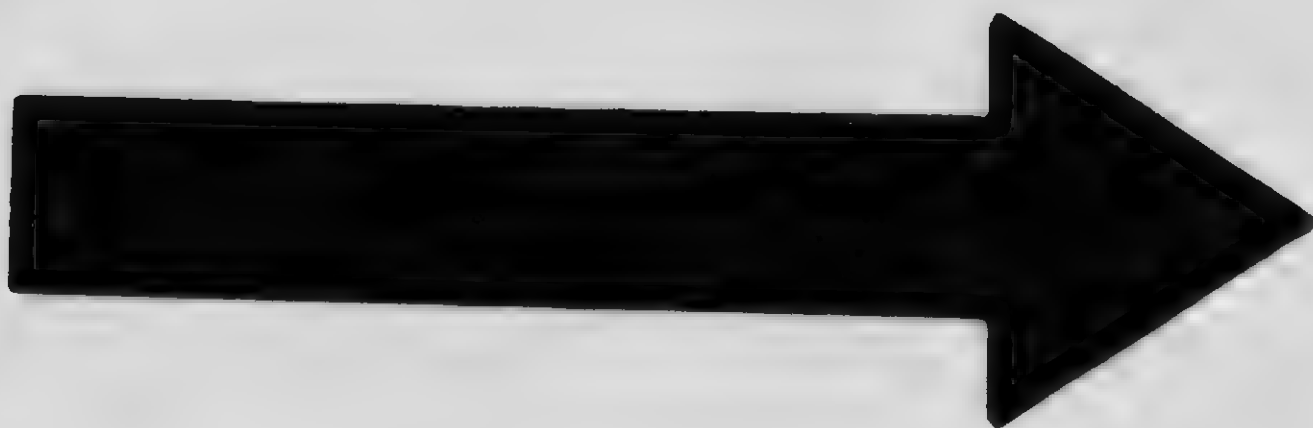
The words were hardly out of his mouth before an irregular series of flashes, in the form of a half-circle, punctuated the gloom on the flat beneath them, and an uneven crackle of musketry broke harshly into the brooding silence. A hundred pealing, horrible echoes made night hideous.

It was quite evident that the would-be murderers intended to make sure of their victims, for they continued firing until they must have exhausted all the cartridges in the magazines of their rifles.

Then there was a lull in the fusillade, and the boys rightly conjectured that the attackers were listening for any signs of life in the riddled tent before rushing it. But surely nothing could be in that tent and live!

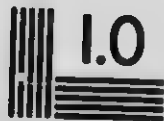
"Now, string out to right and left, and when I pass the word, give them a volley, boys," said Mr. Tapper.

They began to extend, but surely under the circumstances their leader was throwing away chances. If he had only given the order to fire at those flashes of fire, some of their bullets



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would have found billets. Now it would be purely guess-work.

In another minute or two they were several paces apart.

A low whistle from Mr. Tapper, and they fired all together in the direction of the tent.

"Keep it up; string out, and close on the point," cried their leader in a voice of such volume that it must have been distinctly heard by the enemy. "Now, give them a cheer, boys—a rousing Hurrah! There's nothing in the world strikes terror into the heart of an enemy so thoroughly as a right good Hip-hip-hurrah!"

And straightway Mr. Tapper showed them how to do it, to such excellent purpose that, as Peter Dick declared three days afterwards, the noise still occasioned him temporary deafness. As it was, no fog-horn ever invented was so instinct with blood-curdling potentialities as Mr. Tapper's battle-cry. As for Little Dog and Big Head, they raised their respective war-cries with such ardour and capacity that they must have conveyed the impression that there were at least two different tribes of Redskins on the war-path.

"Keep blazing into them, and advance on the tent!" again cried their leader.

It is safe to say that with the rapid firing, the

quick closing-in movement, and the whoops and shouts of the little party, Redfish's lot must have thought that the two canoes they had been shadowing all day had been considerably reinforced. It was an overwhelming and humiliating surprise for them. And to think that old marauders like themselves should have been so deceived and trapped by an empty tent was something too painful to dwell upon. It was no wonder they became demoralised.

"Close on the point, boys, and drive them into the river," cried Mr. Tapper. "There's lots of cover, and no necessity to expose yourselves."

But it was hardly a time to think of cover. The obvious course was to follow up the surprise by swift and bold action.

Keeping up the firing, they advanced rapidly on the peninsula. Redfish and his cut-throats—for the assumption was that it must be Redfish—were much too shaken to think and act with that degree of unanimity which would have made an advance upon them not only extremely dangerous but almost impossible. As it was, they lost their heads, and only thought of escape. One or two turned and fired as they made towards the far end of the peninsula. And then they were faced

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by the dark, swift-flowing current of the Saskatchewan.

Jim was advancing along a narrow channel that crossed the spit, and was some little distance apart from his companions, when suddenly he was confronted by a tall, hatless figure carrying a rifle.

"Hands up!" cried Jim.

But he was too late, for the enemy had come upon him so unexpectedly that before he could bring his rifle to the shoulder, the foeman had dashed it aside with his own and closed with him. Next moment Jim was struggling for his life. So sudden was the attack that Jim had only been able to get the merest glimpse of his adversary's face. But even under the circumstances, and in the semi-darkness, he recognised the well-tended curly locks and foxy face of Redfish. The latter's eyes simply glared like some mad dog's, and his thin lips were drawn back, showing the white teeth.

Round and round they spun in deadly grips, and it is more than likely that Jim would have been speedily borne to earth had it not been for the banks of the channel that reached to their shoulders and acted as a stay. But Redfish, although not a particularly muscular man, was the more experienced and seasoned of the two.

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Moreover, he was desperate, and hate urged him on. He longed to kill this stripling who had turned up to menace his safety just when he had deemed himself free from interference. If he could only kill him, the scoring would not be altogether on one side.

Neither of them had breath to waste in words or to cry out for assistance. Besides, it is questionable if, amid the shouts and the firing, their cries would have been heeded; and they certainly were out of sight in that old flood channel.

Then Redfish bore Jim backwards slowly but surely, and as the latter was gradually forced into such a position that he thought his back must assuredly be broken, his enemy plucked up heart and strength. In point of fact, when Redfish met Jim he was in the act of giving his comrades the slip and making his escape. He never fought when he could possibly help it. He preferred doing the scheming and getting others to do the fighting. When things went against him he became an arrant coward. When his fortunes were in the ascendant he was an unscrupulous tyrant. Now that he knew his enemy was giving way, he felt himself growing stronger. He disengaged his right arm, and by

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a deft movement threw up his hand and caught Jim by the throat. His fingers closed on it like a vice; he put all his strength and hatred into that grip. And then Jim's heel caught on a stone and he fell backwards, and Redfish was uppermost.

CHAPTER X

JIM HAS A CLOSE CALL

REDFISH had Jim at his mercy, and proceeded to make short work of him. Strangling was rather a slow process, but there was a good deal of satisfaction to be got out of it. He had never actually killed any one with his own hands, but that was because he was a clever schemer and knew that it was safer to get others to do such things for him. Besides, despite the fact that he had held life other than his own cheaply, he was a coward with an odd streak of superstition in his nature. But Jim had humiliated him before those with whom he wanted to stand well, and in addition to the strong personal hatred which he cherished, he realised that this strippling bade fair to upset all his plans. Indeed, he was actively engaged in doing so now.

Redfish's fingers were squeezing Jim's throat, and the latter was fast losing consciousness, when a third party appeared upon the scene. It was Big Head, and his presence just then at that

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particular spot was doubtless to be attributed to the fact that he was pursuing tactics of a subtle nature not altogether foreign to him. His first impulse was not to interfere with what might be the rightful adjustment of some private matter, lest the man who was uppermost should take it into his head to resent the interference. He, however, noticed that the latter was so intent on finishing his victim that he had not seen him, and he also observed that the gentleman in question was Redfish. Here was a chance of distinguishing himself.

He brought his gun to the shoulder, and aiming at Redfish's head, pulled the trigger. But his ammunition had become exhausted, and the hammer snapped harmlessly. Redfish heard it, and half turned to see what the matter was. Big Head clubbed his rifle and made a frantic blow at his head. But his foot slipped at the same moment, and the blow fell short, while he himself did the very last thing in the world he wanted to, which was to tumble into the little channel beside Redfish and his victim. Redfish received a wound on his right temple and cheek that would keep the incident green in his memory for many a long day afterwards.

Redfish's grasp on his victim's throat relaxed, and he fell forward. But he did not lose consciousness, and his first instinct was self-preservation. Besides, his victim was surely as good as dead.

Before the Indian could recover himself, Redfish, who was active and of spare build, pulled himself together, and ran swiftly along the watercourse. That was the mistake he made. If he had only jumped out of the channel, where he could have seen where he was going, he might have got clear away. As it was, he actually ran back through the enemy's lines and emerged near the end of the peninsula, where, to his great disgust, he rejoined his sorely pressed comrades. The latter now realised that their only hope was to trust themselves to the cold waters of the Saskatchewan. It was not much of a choice, but they preferred it to having lead introduced into their systems. Moreover, two of them were missing, and no one wanted to add to the number.

They rallied for a moment, fired a volley, and ran quickly to the water's edge. They threw their rifles in, and plunged into the dark, cold current. They could all swim, and if they had luck, would be able to land farther down, circle,

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and make back to where their horses were hidden in a thicket of saskatoon bushes. Fortunately, the Tapper lot had no horses, and would not be able to follow. At the same time, if they took it into their heads to make back to Pasqua and inform the police, it would be exceedingly awkward for them.

They were no sooner out of their depths than they struck out downstream. When their intended victims appeared upon the bank, their heads were indistinct specks on the blurred surface.

"Don't kill the beggars in the water," cried Mr. Tapper. "Fire wide, and give them a jolly good fright."

It would have been extremely difficult to hit those fast-disappearing, wavering specks even if they had wanted to. As it was, Mr Tapper, Little Dog, and Peter Dick doubtless considerably accelerated the pace of the swimmers by making the bullets whistle very close to them. As for Big Head, who had by this time rejoined the others, and had managed to push a few fresh cartridges into the magazine of his rifle, his aim was not above suspicion, as the water was observed to spurt up in very close proximity indeed to these same heads. Big Head had suddenly

developed into a very courageous and even blood-thirsty warrior. Now that his enemies were indiscernible, he ran down the bank, waded up to his knees, and shouted all manner of insulting remarks after them. He called them cowards, and declared that if they would only return he would fight them all at once single-handed.

Mr. Tapper, with his rifle under his arm, regarded the bellicose brave with a reflective smile.

"Big Head," he said, "since you're so very anxious it would be a pity to disappoint you. Get the canoes and we'll pick them up, and you can fight them to your heart's content lower down."

But Big Head suddenly became human, and declared that, after all, the wretched fellows were sufficiently punished and would not be likely to give any more trouble.

He turned his back on the water; then remembering that he had last seen Jim in a very precarious condition indeed, straightway acquainted the others with the fact.

But they had also missed him, and, headed by Big Head, they quickly retraced their steps.

When they reached the scene of Jim's encounter with Redfish they found the former endeavouring to sit up, and gasping for breath. The sight of

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his friends seemed to revive him. Mr. Tapper would not allow him to speak, and sent Big Head for water. In a few minutes more Jim had recovered, though it was more than likely that it would be a day or two before he got over the shock and some of his bruises.

"That fellow Redfish very nearly did for me," he explained a little later. "Indeed, if it hadn't been for one of you—I don't know who it was—I'd have been past help now. Which of you was it?"

Big Head's opportunity had now come, and he took advantage of it, like the artist that he was. He assumed the modesty of a brave man, and the brevity of his speech was eloquent.

"Ough! ough!" he said. "It was nothing so very wonderful for a warrior like Big Head. I saw the mangy big-pot attack my brother Jim, and came to the rescue. Had he not fled in terror, by the great Manitou, I would have slain him! As it was, I punished him badly."

He already felt that he had done something of a very heroic nature, although his stumbling across Redfish had been purely accidental, and he would undoubtedly have very quickly made himself scarce had not Redfish been too busy with Jim to notice him. As it was, he had been

lucky, and it was not an unpleasant sensation to have a swollen head, more especially when one had done nothing to justify such a condition.

As for Little Dog, he said nothing, but regarded his comrade with a peculiarly sharp and speculative eye. He did not particularly wish to incur Big Head's ill-will just then, as he had broken Mr. Tapper's express command in that he, Little Dog, had not allowed sufficient margin for a couple of shots, with the result that two of Redfish's party lay with bullets in them in a sand heap, and the Indian was hoping that the big white man would not happen to find them. He was not quite sure whether the men were dead or alive. If they were dead, and their bodies did not happen to be found, so much the better. If they were not dead, it was obvious they ought to be, and if only he could contrive to steal away from the party unobserved, he would see to it that a certain desirable condition of affairs was realised. It might prevent their brave but somewhat eccentric brother, Mr. Tapper, hampering himself with their useless carcasses. Little Dog was a student of human nature, and knew the drawbacks of sentimentality. He himself was practical.

But Little Dog watched for his opportunity in vain. Mr. Tapper was one of the few white men

whose perceptive faculties were quite as keen as any Red man's, and Little Dog knew it.

They did not turn in again, but struck the tent and got ready for an early start. They loaded up the canoes, and as a pale lemon glow crept into the eastern sky, throwing the neighbouring ridges into sharp relief and silhouetting the tall pines against the wan grey, they pushed their canoes out from the shore.

Three minutes more and they were out in the middle of the stream. Mr. Tapper turned to Peter Dick and, with a sigh of relief, remarked :

"Well, Peter, I'm jolly glad to think we're well out of that."

Next moment there was a ping from the bank they had just left, and for a third time within three weeks Mr. Tapper's high-crowned hat spun into the air and into the water.

Mr. Tapper was too much taken aback by the extraordinary coincidence to express any opinion regarding his unseen foes. He only regarded the hat disgustedly as it floated downstream, and exclaimed :

"Let the wretched thing stay there !"

CHAPTER XI

LITTLE DOG GOES OUT SCOUTING

THERE was no time to pick up Mr. Tapper's hat, even if that gentleman had wanted it ever so badly. It was pretty certain that the shot would be followed by another. In less than a minute, and before the party could recover from their surprise, it was followed by a second, and then a third.

"Use your paddles, boys, and we'll take 'em by turns," cried Mr. Tapper. "There's no going back now. They'd pot us all before we reached the shore. Give way with a will. You, Jim and Peter, blaze away into that bit of scrub; it will help to put them off their aim."

The two Indians, who were paddling at the time, redoubled their efforts. Mr. Tapper picked up his rifle and fired into a clump of sage bush. The boys also fired; but, of course, it was only guess-work. Big Head, especially, paddled to get out of range in a manner that left absolutely nothing to be desired. He was a lithe, sinewy savage,

and although it was upstream work, he made his canoe fairly quiver with the force which he exerted. To sit in an open boat as a species of target was about the last thing in the world to suit Big Head.

As for Little Dog, although he seemed to work, he really only did so in a perfunctory fashion. He set his jaws together, and told himself that it would serve them all jolly well right if they were shot for their foolish leniency. And to think that he had been such a fool as not to make sure of those two fellows he dropped in the hollow! It was probably one of them who was potting at them now. He sighed for the good old days when both of their scalps would most assuredly have been hanging at his belt, and there could not possibly have been any chance of such a sequel. The next fellows he disabled would have to look out.

For twenty minutes they were a target for their unseen enemy's fire, and although one bullet pierced the bark of Mr. Tapper's canoe above the water-line, and many others whistled around them, no one was hit. It was not until they ran abreast of a long, narrow island, and got in lee of it, that they had comparative peace.

It was then that Little Dog asked Mr. Tapper to excuse him for an hour or so, while they

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recovered their wind. He said he had left something behind at the last camp, and he wanted to go back and fetch it. There was no necessity for any one to go with him, he explained. He would go a little farther upstream to a place he knew, and cross. The man who had been doing the shooting would not see him until he was right on him, and then he would probably spare time to demand an apology.

Mr. Tapper, knowing that Little Dog might leave altogether if he were not given permission, told him he might go, but warned him it was by no means unlikely that the lurking enemy might be just as wide-awake as Little Dog. But this did not scare Little Dog a little bit. He had managed to get a good many things out of life, and getting his own back was one of them. Mr. Tapper also knew that one man might go back unseen to their old camp, where two or more would be almost certain to be seen. Moreover, much as he desired to avoid bloodshed, it might only mean the shedding of more if those cowardly snipers were not taught a lesson.

Little Dog took his departure unostentatiously. Big Head, feeling sure that his comrade would refuse his services, had volunteered to go with him, and nearly had a fit when the little man

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made a show of considering his offer. Before Little Dog went, Mr. Tapper had a few words with him, and the gist of his conversation was to the effect that if he succeeded in getting an interview with the sniper, he was to insist on being enlightened as to the whereabouts of the missing John Thorne. This the sniper might find to his advantage to do. Mr. Tapper also made the stipulation that if the required information was given, apart from disarming him, he was not to do him any particular injury.

In Little Dog's absence, breakfast was made ready and duly despatched. Their late excitement in no way interfered with their consumption of billy-made tea, freshly made scones, and juicy antelope steaks grilled on the glowing charcoal. They used a peculiar dry wood that made no smoke. Little Dog had declared that he would not have any appetite until he interviewed the man or men who had made things so lively for them a little earlier. There was something, however, that perplexed the boys, and Jim it was who gave utterance to it.

"Supposing," he said, "Little Dog doesn't manage to surprise the man who fired at us, how are we to find out exactly where my uncle is? You see, there are probably two lots of those

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scoundrels. One is probably with John Thorne now, and the fellows who attacked us last night were doubtless only brought from the settlement by Redfish. It seems to me that this is a tremendously big country in which to look for any one, more particularly when you haven't got definite information."

Mr. Tapper looked thoughtfully into the dying fire. He was now bareheaded, but his thick and magnificent crop of hair bore eloquent testimony to the fact that any sympathy with him over his hatless condition was quite unnecessary.

"Of course, I've been thinking about that," he replied; "but, you see, I've got a very good idea as to the exact locality which they are pretty sure to make use of for their purposes. It is a wild spot called the Bad Lands, terribly broken and full of caves and gullies, and where there are no trees or herbage. We will be able to find their tracks easily enough, and Little Dog and Big Head will be quite as good as bloodhounds."

Big Head did not quite follow the reference to bloodhounds, but suspecting that something of a complimentary nature was implied, grunted, "Ough, ough!" with an assumption of modest worth.

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"I hope Little Dog will be all right," observed Jim. "I offered to go with him, but he wouldn't hear of it."

"It would have been no good," commented Mr. Tapper. "An Indian on a job like that must go alone; a white man would be only in the way."

Mr. Tapper took up a position amongst the bushes where he could sweep the opposite shore with his field-glasses, but he could see nothing. The others had listened intently for any sound of firing, but nothing was heard. A couple of hours passed, and they were all getting rather anxious, when, to the surprise of all save Big Head, Little Dog suddenly reappeared amongst them. He wore his customary expression, which was one that seemed to denote lack of interest in things external, and considerable preoccupation with his own thoughts.

"Well, Little Dog, you'll have some breakfast?" said Mr. Tapper, who understood his man.

"Ough, ough!" ejaculated the Indian, as if he were addressing no one in particular. "It is no time to eat now. We must get on our way quickly. We must ascend the stream that runs out of the valley a little farther up, and get to the head of it. Then we must portage a good

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deal, and carry our canoes across the divide. It will be very hard work, but that is the quickest way into the Bad Lands. Once on the other side of the range, there is a stream, strong and deep, that flows like an arrow, and in it are many rapids. These we must shoot. The eagle itself will hardly be able to keep up with us, so swift is the current. Let us away."

"Then you have heard that John Thorne is there?" observed Mr. Tapper.

"He is there in the body," said Little Dog simply; "but unless we hurry, his spirit may be elsewhere."

CHAPTER XII

HIS PERSUASIVE WAYS

THE canoes were speedily loaded up, and soon they were paddling upstream again. It was a glorious morning and, as is usual in the North-West, the sun shone down brilliantly. One could almost see the rapid, feverish growth of leaf and blade. It was the sort of morning that made one glad to be alive.

Knowing as they did that their late enemies were broken and scattered, they hugged the opposite shore, which made paddling much easier, seeing that the current always runs more slowly at the sides.

Little Dog had got into the same canoe as Mr. Tipper, so that, without delaying the party, he might report the result of his late sortie to him.

An Indian is either spare of words or launches into an epic. In the present instance, Little Dog related what had happened to him without any elaboration or attempt at oratory such as

Big Head would have employed. At the same time, it is very questionable if that gentleman would ever have earned the right to. After they had been paddling in silence for half-an-hour, the spirit moved Little Dog, and he told his story.

After leaving the camp he had swum across the river at a point where he was unseen, holding his gun in one hand just clear of the water. Once on the other side, he quickly took advantage of a thin line of wolf-willow fringing the river-bank, and by skirting it, and travelling up an overflow channel, he managed to keep himself out of sight. He had also to keep a very sharp look-out, as if by any chance he should be sighted first, his fate was as good as settled.

But fortune favoured him, and on getting out of the channel to look around, he saw one of the men he had wounded but had refrained from finishing, limping along with rifle in hand in cover of the bank. He looked a ragged and hunted specimen of humanity, one hardly worth scalping. One trouser-leg had been cut off at the knee, showing that the same had been used as a species of bandage and wound round a cut of some sort. It must have been bleeding pretty freely. The hired assassin's face was ghastly and dirty. He reminded one of some wild beast that,

having been worsted in a fight, is on the war-path again and thirsting for revenge. Still, he had already been having some of his change back.

Although Little Dog felt sure that another of the assassins had recovered, and was somewhere in the neighbourhood, he realised he must take chances and tackle the man in front of him. It would not do to fire, as that might bring the other fellow on the scene; and, moreover, it would spoil his chances of extracting valuable information. It was an exceedingly difficult situation, but Little Dog had all his life been tackling such things.

Little Dog noticed that the enemy would have to pass close to him. If he flattened himself against a certain clay-coloured boulder, and the unsuspecting one kept his rifle at the trail, he might manage the business. Next moment the human was employing the same imitative faculty that many members of the animal kingdom possess, only to a much greater degree.

To a casual observer he had become part of the boulder, and almost indistinguishable from it. His rifle he had left behind the rock lest the glitter of the brass-work might betray him. His knife he held concealed in his right hand behind him. His was the stillness of the inanimate, and his eyes were all but closed lest their

lustre should be seen, as a hare's often are in the heather. He almost ceased to breathe as the enemy came hobbling past.

And then his action resembled that of a gigantic Jack-in-the-box, for he seemed to fly apart. His legs and arms shot out as he sprang into the air, and came crushing down on top of the sorely surprised enemy. Next moment the white man was lying on his back harmless, while Little Dog sat on his chest, with one hand grasping the hair of his head, and the other with a knife describing a significant half-circle in air. Still the white man, despite his being a would-be murderer, had more courage than most of his kind. With what breath there was left in him, he had asked Little Dog if he meant to scalp him alive. He explained that if his victorious enemy would only oblige him by first effectually knocking him on the head, it would be comparatively humane treatment. He decidedly objected to losing his grizzled locks while he yet retained consciousness.

This was Little Dog's opportunity, and in order to convince his victim that he was not merely having a game with him and meant business, he made a trifling but painful incision at the spot where operations are usually begun.

This was too much for the white man, who, realising that struggling would only make matters worse, begged for mercy.

Then Little Dog, still flourishing his knife in a professional fashion, told him that unless he at once communicated to him the very latest news concerning John Thorne, worse than scalping might befall him. He said that as he already knew a good deal concerning him, he only wanted corroborative evidence. He also cautioned him that the slightest perversion of the truth would be fatal. If he, Little Dog, was satisfied that he told the truth, he would probably allow him to depart without further molestation. The matter was worth his serious consideration.

The white man, whose name was Blake, then told him how John Thorne was at that moment a prisoner, with two men in charge of him, in a certain lonely gully in the Bad Lands. He would never have been allowed to live, only Redfish had realised that the moment Thorne was dead, he would be at once blackmailed by the others. He had, doubtless, left him with the two men already mentioned under the belief that he had not long to live. Indeed, he might at that moment be dead, or he might be alive and

in good health. Everything depended on the attitude of his two custodians.

Little Dog, with an eye to future evidence, then released Blake, and covering him with his rifle, bade him walk off in a certain direction, assuring him that a moment's hesitation or skittishness would be fatal.

As for the other assassin, Little Dog was obliged to admit that he had found him lying dead. He must have been killed by a stray bullet on the previous night, he explained. It was a deplorable casualty, but, as he dryly remarked, even white people sometimes met with accidents.

The situation and their line of action was now very obvious. They must push on if they wanted to save John Thorne. There was no saying what the two scoundrels in charge of him might take it into their heads to do. Such wretches were very capricious. It was also very likely that Redfish and his crew, smarting for revenge, and discovering the true strength of Mr. Tapper's company, would recruit more blackguards and, swiftly returning, do their level best to wipe them out. The kidnappers would be on their mettle this time, and unlikely to strike until they were sure of their prey.

An hour later they struck the tributary, which

came down through a wooded ravine. Then followed a couple of hours' hard work portaging or carrying their canoes past rapids and falls. They began to realise by the smallness of the stream, and the splendid view behind them, that they had ascended considerably. The boys looked at the great scarred ridge ahead, and wondered if they actually had to scale that.

While they were passing upwards through a clump of pines, shouldering the light canoes, they heard a strange noise that brought them to a sudden halt and made them hold their breaths. It was a loud, harsh, croaking sound like a broken bleat or bellow. There was a heavy rush of hoofs or feet, a mighty clash, a hoarse roar, then a further drumming of hoofs. Next moment the canoes were on the ground, and they pressed warily forward. Then Little Dog, who was in the lead, turned round and lifted his hand warningly.

"Take care of yourselves," he said; "two bull-moose are fighting!"

And there in a flat open space were two of North America's gigantic deer engaged in a terrific combat. They were bigger and higher than any horses, and their monster antlers were dealing terrible blows. With heads down, they butted and pushed each other mercilessly. Then they

would draw apart and charge again, till one wondered how any living thing could withstand such an impact. Their tongues hung from their mouths, and their eyes blazed with fury.

Forgetful for the moment of the danger they ran, the little party of spectators drew nearer. Then all at once they were brought to their senses. The maddened animals had seen them.

"Get up trees for your lives," yelled Mr. Tapper. "Don't attempt to run. Climb the nearest trees!"

The great angry brutes, forgetting their individual wrongs in this fresh common danger, stood stock-still for a moment. Then, with loud trumpeting of rage, they joined issues, lowered their heads, and charged the intruders for all they were worth.

CHAPTER XIII

AN EXCITING TIME

NEVER did men and boys scatter more quickly than Mr. Tapper's party when those two infuriated moose-bulls charged. Luckily they had put down the canoes, which were therefore well out of harm's way, but they had to dispose of themselves, and there was no time to pick out likely trees.

Mr. Tapper and Little Dog were the only two who made a stand, and that was probably because the enraged brutes did not directly charge them. Anyhow, they were the only two who kept their heads. Mr. Tapper fired at one moose, but his bullet struck the lowered massive antlers and glanced off; while Little Dog, owing to the unpleasant proximity of moose Number Two on his side, missed altogether—which under the circumstances was not at all remarkable. Indeed, no human being could possibly have had time to single out the right moose and take proper aim.

As for Mr. Tapper, he at first stood his ground



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right bravely; then all of a sudden he seemed to change his view of the situation. What probably drew the determined charge of the larger of the two brutes on him was, doubtless, the wonderful display of lung power which he gave when he shouted to the boys. It indeed ought to have been quite sufficient to have scared anything other than a mad moose-bull. Mr. Tapper was an excellent shot, but with those great flattened horns right in front of him the extraordinary thing would have been if he had missed them. The moment he saw that he had wasted his shot, he skipped nimbly behind a tree, and pumped another cartridge into the slot in case of fresh developments.

Meanwhile Peter Dick and Jim, who had unfortunately placed their rifles on the ground when they had set down the canoes, mechanically obeyed the thundered order of Mr. Tapper. They found no difficulty in getting up trees. The thing was to find the trees.

Missing Mr. Tapper, moose Number One continued its course as it caught sight of Little Dog. But most unfortunately, just as that gentleman was lifting his gun to his shoulder to fire, Big Head, who seemed to be in a highly excited state, while getting out of the way of one moose

ran right across the track of the other, with the result that he collided with Little Dog and bowled that gentleman over like a ninepin. Indeed, both fell, luckily somewhat to one side. They just missed a very sudden and effectual exit from a troubled world afflicted with moose-bulls.

Little Dog said something to himself as he scrambled quickly behind the bole of a convenient tree minus his rifle, while Big Head, with a supreme disregard as to what happened to his friend, scrambled quickly to his feet, and catching sight of an overhanging branch, created a record in high jumps by managing to catch hold of it. He took a series of ever-increasing swings after the manner of an acrobat, and just as he took a bigger one than usual, intended to enable him to catch another branch with his feet, the moose was under him again. This time the huge brute partly stood up on its hind-legs to get at him. The tip of a powerful antler just managed to catch on the most important portion of Big Head's wearing apparel; there was an excruciating r-r-rip! and the dandy realised he was debarred from figuring again in public until such time as he was in a position to do some tailoring.

But with his toes he caught the branch he

was swinging to reach—which, after all, was the main thing just then. He swung himself into safety. He was now in a position to enjoy the discomfiture of others, and to volunteer advice. He loved telling his friends how things ought to be done. The loss of his nether garment was certainly awkward, but the prospective sport would more than compensate for any temporary inconvenience.

Mr. Tapper was about to fire at moose Number Two, when a yell from Little Dog made him turn round sharply. He had only time to drop his rifle, so as to make a grab at an overhanging bough, when moose Number One rushed down upon him from another direction. It was a narrow shave; the antlers of the huge creature brushed Mr. Tapper's dangling feet aside as if they had been cobwebs.

The two roused animals were now completely masters of the field, and looked as if they gloried in the fact. Their attitude was one of insolent derision. A moose, with its huge, consequential nose, stagey antlers, and spare hind-quarters, is an absurd-looking creature at any time. One was now engaged in rearing upon its hind-legs and trying to butt Mr. Tapper, while the other was operating with a like enthusiasm underneath

Little Dog, to that gentleman's no small discomfiture. The branch he clung to was beginning to bend in a most alarming fashion, and there was no other he could conveniently reach.

It was at this juncture that Peter Dick saw his opportunity. Unobserved by the two moose, he slid down from his perch, ran to his rifle, picked it up, and managed to reach a convenient limb on a tree Lappily situated.

An odd feature of the situation now forced itself on those who figured in it. After a move made by Peter Dick or any of the others, Big Head was sure to shout belated instructions. It did not seem to strike him that he was somewhat behindhand, and that it was quite unnecessary to tell them not to do things that they had already done or had not the slightest intention of doing. The fact that he personally was almost within reach of those deadly antlers, and that if the branch he clung to only gave a little more it would be all up with him, did not seem to deter him.

Peter Dick had now his rifle, and he waited his opportunity. It was not long in coming. As the moose-bull under Big Head paused preparatory to making a leap at him, the boy took careful aim behind the near shoulder and fired. At the

same moment the huge creature sprang into the air. Whether it was the effect of the shot or the result of an accident it is difficult to say, but just then Big Head slipped from his insecure position and came down on the neck of the mortally wounded animal. Next moment he was sent flying over its head, and, fortunately for him, clear of its great antlers. The moose took another spasmodic leap, and fell all of a heap.

At the same moment the second moose, as if momentarily paralysed by what was happening, stood stock-still right underneath Little Dog. In less time than it takes to write it, that wary and wiry Redskin, clinging with one hand to a bough, reached over and drove his great hunting-knife into that extremely vulnerable spot where skull and spine meet. The moose fell where it stood like a pole-axed bullock.

The whole affair was at an end, and Mr. Tapper and the others, with feelings of intense relief, descended from their insecure perches. The adventure had in reality occupied only a very few minutes, but it seemed to them as if they had been passing through an uncommonly prolonged and unpleasant form of nightmare. Their first thought was for Big Head. That gentleman, providentially for him, had been sent flying into

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some thick undergrowth which broke his fall, and all that could now be seen of him was a couple of well-developed legs flourishing in air. It was certainly unkind of Little Dog to suggest that he should be allowed to stop there. Mr. Tapper, of course, would not hear of it, and pulled him into view somewhat unceremoniously.

Big Head, when he found that, contrary to his expectations, he had no broken bones, turned his attention to the dead animals that had given them all such a rough time. Then he drew the sleeve of his red flannel shirt over his forehead, and said:

"Ough, ough! was it not a lucky thing that I was here to tell you what to do!"

CHAPTER XIV

A GLIMPSE OF THE AVERNUS

AFTER all, Mr. Tapper and the boys were too much relieved by the turn things had taken to trouble about Big Head's claims to any credit attached to the moose campaign. Big Head's anatomy had received some violent shocks, so he could hardly be expected to pose as a dispassionate judge. He was coldly but politely advised by Little Dog to attend as soon as possible to the condition of his wardrobe, and not to worry about trifles.

Having to carry the canoes up and past many rapids, not to mention the trying nature of the adventures already recounted, had somewhat tired the party. So, as it was now late in the afternoon, and it would soon be difficult to distinguish their way, they resolved to go only a little farther and camp for the night. As the flesh of the two moose-bulls was of no use to them, they did not waste time over it. They climbed a little farther up the hill lest

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the scent of the dead animals might attract bears, and on a grassy platform beneath a huge overhanging rock they prepared to camp for the night. Three fine brass wires with alarms attached were stretched across the only means of approach to their camping ground, and they had the satisfaction of knowing that that night at least they would all be able to sleep soundly without fear of surprise. Even if their assailants of the previous evening rallied and followed them up, it would be impossible to pass the entanglement without alarming the camp.

That night the boys slept as soon as they put their heads on their improvised pillows of dry moss. Save for the fact of some wild animal running against the wires, and startling them all in rather an unpleasant fashion, the night passed peacefully. When again Jim and Peter awoke, they found a cheerful fire of dry wood burning, and Mr. Tapper, who had been up and washed nearly an hour ago, engaged in grilling appetising antelope steaks over the sweet wood charcoal. The camp-kettle was also slung across the fire in gipsy fashion.

"Now then, boys, wash and breakfast," cried Mr. Tapper cheerily at sight of their wondering faces. "I'm just going to put the tea in the

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kettle. Get a rustle on, and you'll not want to change places with the Governor-General.

The boys did not need a second call. The bracing air of the North-West is such that a man's appetite becomes so keen that not even a desire for more sleep can enable him to ignore it. They ran down the little terrace, and in another minute were having such a cold tub in the crystal-like stream that the blood fairly tingled through their bodies for the next half-hour.

It was noticed that Big Head had repaired the damage sustained in the previous day's adventure, and it was more than suspected that Little Dog had aroused him an hour before the others and insisted on him doing so. When Little Dog insisted he was always politeness itself, and Big Head especially knew it was only wasting words to argue.

"Have a good breakfast, boys," said Mr. Tapper, himself setting an eloquent example. "You see, we've got to cross the great divide to-day, and it will be terribly hard work carrying these canoes. However, by so doing we cut off about fifty miles; it's worth it."

"What is it like on the other side?" inquired Jim. "Shall we have to carry the canoes any particular distance before finding water?"

Mr. Tapper paused for a minute before replying, and there was a thoughtful expression on his face.

"There is water," he said, "and any amount of it, but I'm not just certain about tackling it. There's a stream that's like a mill-race, and it goes at the rate of about forty miles an hour. It's for all the world like a tremendous toboggan slide down the side of a mountain. And it's two miles long. Just think of it!"

"Hurrah!" cried Peter Dick, immensely excited. "By Jove, what fun we'll have! That's what I call ripping! I'd like to race old Big Head down that chute!"

"I'm afraid our friend Big Head would have the laugh against you," observed Mr. Tapper. "It's one of the things you've got to see is an Indian with a paddle. One reads such stereotyped rot about shooting rapids, and as it's usually written by people who have never seen one outside a picture-book, one doesn't realise what constitutes the real danger."

"But if one only thought of the danger of a thing, one would never do anything," argued Peter. "Surely no really brave man can think of danger."

"And that's just where you make the mistake,

Peter," commented Mr. Tapper. "It's only the fool who doesn't consider the risk, and he frequently comes to grief because he never goes about a thing in the proper way. The really brave man is he who undertakes something fully realising the danger he runs, and who prepares to meet it. The gulf between foolhardiness and bravery is one of the biggest differences I know."

Peter Dick, who was somewhat inclined to jump at conclusions, reflected. If he had been talking to a chum who knew as little about the matter as himself, he would most likely have argued the matter out; but he realised he was speaking to a man who knew what he was talking about, so he had the good sense to venture no further opinion, and to think over what had been said. But Mr. Tapper had not done with the subject.

"At the same time, Peter," he continued, "I'm not quite so sure but that we'll be able to gratify your wishes. You see, if we are to be of any use to Jim's uncle we have got to make extraordinary efforts to reach him. Only because we want daylight to negotiate the other side of the mountain, I'd have travelled the greater part of last night. But there is such a thing as being penny-wise and pound-foolish. We want

the full light of day for what we may have to do."

"Then we may descend that stream you speak of after all," said Peter.

"If there's water enough we may," replied Mr. Tapper. "You see, the stream I speak of begins somewhat differently from most others. It takes its rise all at once at a huge spring—a considerable stream you might call it—that gushes out from the side of a hill, and is to a certain extent independent of strictly local floods. If it happens to be of sufficient volume we may risk it. Of course, I wouldn't tackle it unless with such experienced paddlers as Little Dog and Big Head. The white men who possess the necessary quality of eye and nerve unfortunately don't often have the experience. But we must pack up. We have a stiff climb ahead of us.

For the next couple of hours the boys had the hardest piece of work cut out for them that they had ever tackled. They thought they would never get to the top of that great divide. The sun seemed to gain strength as they ascended, and the walking was of the severest description. But they tramped on right bravely, and took turn-about shouldering the canoes. As for Mr. Tapper, he seemed indefatigable, and trudged

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along merrily, singing and laughing as if to keep their spirits up.

As for the two Indians, they said little, but kept sturdily on with the dogged pertinacity of their kind. Their eloquent Ough, Oughs were the only expression of feeling they allowed to escape them.

At times they struck huge snow-wreaths, and the dazzle from them was almost more than they could bear. They trudged through long grass, up steep hillsides, and over such loose and rocky ground that they thought if they did not eventually drop down exhausted, their boots must assuredly give way.

At last they stood on the top of the great divide, and such a panorama of flood and fell, clearly cut mountain-top and rolling prairie, was stretched out before them that they could only gaze dumbly upon it, lost in admiration and wonder. This was indeed the Great Lone Land—the land that had lain comparatively tenantless through the ages—the place which was destined to furnish homes for the overcrowded millions of older countries, and to be the nursery of a coming people.

Thinking of all that it suggested, it was no wonder no one spoke.

And then, immediately on their left and in a slight hollow, they beheld a truly remarkable sight. It was a huge spring—a veritable river—that gushed out from the side of a rise and flowed with a great sweep at race-horse speed down a far-stretching hillside until it rounded a bend and was lost to view. It resembled a gigantic mill-race. A couple of miles farther down still it could be seen emerging from the side of the brown hill, gleaming like a streak of silver—a river churned into foam. But it was its entry into that great gloomy gorge which fascinated the boys. To think of trusting one's self into its awesome jaws! If anything happened to the canoes, what hope could there possibly be for them! Could Mr. Tapper have really been serious when he spoke of shooting such an Avernus?

"Well, Peter," said Mr. Tapper. "It doesn't exactly look ripping, does it? I see there is water enough. Do you feel like tackling it?"

CHAPTER XV

INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH

PETER DICK did not answer for a minute. He, like Jim, was gazing awe-struck upon that vast mill-race that welled up a tremulous, seething column from an apparently bottomless shaft, and which sped with a royal sweep down and across a sloping plateau, until it disappeared over the lip of a wave-like slope. Lower down still it reappeared, and cut a channel for itself through a distant hillside.

"It's a much bigger affair than I thought," remarked Peter Dick soberly; "and it does boil and go at a tremendous rate, doesn't it? An express train going for all it was worth would be a tame affair compared to a car going down there."

"Slightly more exciting than the water-chute at Earl's Court—eh, Peter?" observed Jim.

But Peter's lips only puckered in a vain attempt to frame a word that would express his boundless contempt for such a comparison.

"It is perhaps what my brother Peter would call 'ripping,'" observed Little Dog, with a subtle hint of irony in his voice.

"Could you steer a canoe down there, now you're on that tack?" asked Peter Dick somewhat sharply.

"I have already done so," replied Little Dog quietly. "But I swore at the time that I would never do it again."

"Then Big Head and I will go down," exclaimed Peter. "You're not afraid of an affair like that, are you, Big Head? No, Big Head is a brave man, and if he loves not the moose when he happens to be wearing his Sunday clothes, there is not an Indian in all the Territories can touch him at using a paddle. Is not that so, Big Head?"

But although Big Head would have liked to disclaim all prowess with the paddle, his affair on the previous day with the moose had so compromised his reputation that he felt death itself would be preferable to again having to submit to the sarcasms of Little Dog. At the same time, he was rather a good hand with the paddle, and he knew that although no Indian ever shot that hurrying flood merely for the fun of it, he felt he had the necessary strength and quickness of

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eye to do it successfully. He therefore resolved to make capital out of an awkward situation, and declared with no little emphasis that there were no rapids in the world he could not shoot.

Mr. Tapper, however, chose to direct matters.

"It's this way, boys," he said. "I wouldn't ask you to risk this trip at all unless it was a case of life or death. You've come out to find your uncle, and the chances are that unless you find him very soon his life may be forfeit. It's a dangerous trip, but I think that with Little Dog at the bow of one canoe, and Big Head in another, we'll pull through all right. Are you all prepared to risk it?"

Jim and Peter said "Yes" with just the slightest suspicion of lack of enthusiasm. Little Dog did not condescend to reply, but gave a little sniff of contempt; while Big Head, with the abandon and desperation of a plunger, expressed his determination to do or die with quite unnecessary vehemence.

"Then prepare to receive cavalry," said Mr. Tapper, who, once having gone through a fortnight's drill with the volunteers in his native village, perpetuated the memory of the same by occasionally using a few military terms. "Get ready the canoes, Big Head. Jim and I will

come with you in one ; and, Little Dog, you and Peter will go in the other. And I think, Little Dog, you'd better lead the way. I should think you know it best. It won't do to get too close to each other."

"If my brother Timothy Tapper will only give me time to light my pipe," observed Little Dog, "I will do what he asks presently."

The boys noted with no slight degree of interest that even the stoical little brave was not above putting on occasional side.

It was with no little suppressed excitement, and with beating hearts, that the boys prepared to embark on what, to them, promised to be the most exciting adventure of their lives. It would be useless to say that they did not feel considerable apprehension. They would hardly have been human could they have looked upon that great body of water bubbling up as in a cauldron, and racing towards what appeared to be the brink of an abyss, and not feel any. It, indeed, took quite exceptional nerve to face such a journey. But they felt there were others they could trust who were sharing their danger ; and, after all, it was a race the issue of which was life or death, and meant so much to so many. They had come out to Canada at the invitation of John Thorne

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to share in the results of his labour and enterprise. They found him the victim of a base conspiracy, and a prisoner in the hands of those who only awaited their opportunity to deprive him of his life. And now they were within reasonable expectation of effecting his rescue, and was it likely they were going to lose valuable time because they were afraid of the risks? No, indeed!

"Now, Peter and Little Dog, good luck to you!" cried Mr. Tapper as he steadied the canoe for them to step into in a tiny bay. "Jim, Big Head and I will follow in two twos."

Little Dog, with his pipe between his teeth, and without the slightest sign of concern or interest on his wrinkled old face, stepped into the canoe, and knelt in the bow, paddle in hand. Peter Dick, with just a suspicion of queerness stealing over him, followed and sat down behind him, his hands grasping the sides of the canoe.

"Let her go," said Little Dog, "and if nothing happens, *till we meet again!* It is a good way, in any case, of journeying to the Happy Hunting Grounds."

"Au revoir!" they shouted in response.

Next moment Little Dog raised his paddle, dipped it, and they were off.

At first the canoe moved slowly; and then, as the bow was caught in the current, it headed downstream at an ever-quickenning pace. Before it had gone thirty yards it was hurrying along at the speed of an express train.

"Now then, Jim and Big Head," cried Mr. Tapper, "into the canoe with you! A two minutes' start means a lot in a stream like this."

In another minute they too were off, and Big Head, now thoroughly on his mettle, needed no instructions how to guide his frail craft.

At first Peter Dick, in the leading canoe, felt something akin to terror as the rocky banks began to rush past them. It was as if he was being shot over the bend of a rainbow clear of the world. The pace they were traveling at was so terrific that he wondered if he could continue to keep his senses. How was it possible they could ever pull up again! They must of a certainty be dashed to pieces somewhere, and that would be the end of them. The wind caught his breath, and he realised that very soon he would not be able to breathe at all. It was difficult to do so now. It mattered little whether they struck a rock or not; they were doomed in any case.

He was roused from the condition of sheer

panic on which he was bordering by a shout from Little Dog. It distracted his attention for the moment. The Indian's back was to him as he knelt, paddle in hand, and with his long hair streaming in the wind, as motionless as if he had been carved out of a block of ebony. Every now and again Little Dog would raise his paddle in air, then suddenly dipping it, work like one who was doing it for his life—as indeed he was. And then he would suddenly cease paddling and become once more the eager watcher.

It was odd that at such a critical time Peter Dick should occupy his mind with trivial speculations as to whether or not Little Dog still kept his pipe in his mouth. In point of fact he did, although, of course, he could not smoke. The speculation went to prove that often when some important crisis in our lives is impending, a wise Providence decrees that the mind will frequently dwell on the most inconsequent details. Otherwise we could not stand the strain.

Faster and faster flew the canoe. It was as if they were being launched into space, and what they saw of the banks on either side was only a confused blur. They gasped for breath. The spray resolved itself into solid pellets of

ice, and stung them on the hands and face. They were nearing the brink of that awful abyss, and the noise of the troubled waters was as thunder in their ears. How could any frail boat live in such a devil's cauldron!

And then, as the canoe seemed to leap into space, Peter Dick threw himself down on his back, closed his eyes, and held on to the sides for dear life.

It surely was the end.

Down, down, down! A sinking at the pit of the stomach, and a sensation as if one was going over a precipice in a particularly realistic nightmare. A roar in one's ears as if all the forces in Nature were warring together, and a vague wonder why the end of all things was so long in coming. And then an odd shock, a splash of ice-cold water on one's face, a feeling as of some intangible force catching and buoying one up, and then the forward motion again as if one were being shot into space.

Peter Dick opened his eyes. At first all he could see was the bent figure of Little Dog, who was plying his paddle with a lightning-like rapidity. The hair of the Indian was streaming in the wind, and his brown skin glistened with the wet. On either side the banks seemed higher,

but the descent was not quite so marked. Neither did the canoe seem to race at such a terrific pace. Still, in all truth, it went quite fast enough, and it swayed alarmingly from side to side. Raising himself he sat up and realised that they had shot the falls. He wondered how they could have done it.

When he ventured to look back he wondered still more, for at that moment he saw the other canoe going over, and he held his breath with a species of terror at the sight. He realised what Little Dog and himself had passed through. Big Head's canoe, with the Indian sitting motionless in the bow, seemed plunging to destruction. How could it go over like that and live? It seemed to leap clear out of the water and speed downward like an arrow. Then it passed out of sight. Next moment it reappeared on the crest of a wave.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Bravo, Big Head!" shouted Peter Dick, unable to contain himself longer. "Bravo, Little Dog! Bravo, Big Head! Bravo, both of you! Hip-hip-hurrah!"

And, after all, it was not to be wondered at if the boy's enthusiasm got the better of him and he shouted like one possessed. Civilisation has done much for man, but the savage at least does

not know the meaning of nerves. It raises primitive man in one's estimation to see him face death like that.

But never once did Little Dog look round to see what possessed his passenger. It was no time for idle curiosity. They were not out of the wood yet, and perhaps the most dangerous part of the journey was still to come. This was indeed the case, and perhaps it was as well that the boys did not know it.

Straight as an arrow towards the opposite hillside rushed the canoe. Where did the stream get to?

They were now in a species of valley, and the high banks, black and grim, were gradually closing in on either hand. Then a great mass of land seemed to rise up right in front of them, and Peter Dick realised that if he had just shot one of the most dreaded and dangerous rapids in the North-West Territories of Canada, the chances were that he had still to face an experience equally terrifying.

There was a tall, dark slit in the mountains as if some Titanic force had split it in two, and the stream, which seemed to have gained in volume, had taken advantage of this outlet. Another minute and they were at the portals of the great

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gorge. The angry waters, confined and pent between the mighty walls of rock, bubbled and boiled in a fearsome fashion. Sheer up went these walls, and the height of them shut out the light of the sun. It was like going into an ice chamber to pass into the cold, damp, gloomy shade, and the ever wet and glistening surface of the rock was curiously mottled with sprawling lichens of vivid green and glowing orange.

And now the sounds that seemed to surround them in the open ceased, and the pent water flowed with a hollow sough and even murmur as of the distant sea. It was silence compared to the rush and broken sounds of the open.

There was a straight run of a few hundred yards right ahead, and Little Dog, paddle in hand, turned round and looked at Peter.

"You frightened?" he asked.

"I can't say I half like it," replied the boy; "but it can't be much worse than what we've passed through."

"Much more difficult," said Little Dog calmly. "Big hole in water that go round about, and plenty rock immediately."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Peter; "that is comforting, Little Dog. Goodness, here we are!"

There was a sharp bend and a broadening of

the stream, but, stretching from wall to wall, a swirling whirlpool with a gaping, groaning shaft right in the centre. It made one think of the insatiable throat of some fearsome monster to look at it. How were they to keep clear? Surely they were doomed!

Little Dog bent nearly double. His muscles stood out like cords. His paddle flashed in air and dipped into the seething green depths with lightning-like strokes. They must keep in the outer circle. Once in the inner ring and they were beyond all earthly succour. The thing was to keep clear of it, and yet not to be dashed against the slippery sides of the canyon. What an egg-shell was their canoe, hemmed in by such Titanic forces! Peter Dick's heart was in his mouth as the frail craft grazed the slippery rock. He felt the birch bark give to the pressure. They must assuredly be swamped. The Red man's paddle rose and dipped so quickly that one could hardly see it. All the manly attributes—and there were many—that characterised Little Dog rose to the occasion. And then, by an almost superhuman effort, and with an inarticulate cry of triumph on his lips, he sent the bow of the canoe heading downstream clear of the fatal ring.

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Peter Dick breathed again, but there was not a hurrah left in him. He raised himself again and looked ahead. He could hear a roar as of breaking water somewhere round the next bend, and he was conscious of a dip in the stream and increased pace. Next moment, and almost before he had time to realise the impending danger, he saw a huge rock right in the centre of his course. A part of the cliff had fallen and divided the stream. Little Dog plied his paddle again, and worked like one possessed. They were heading right on to that rock, and it was surely impossible to avoid being dashed against it.

But Little Dog was very much alive. The canoe heeled and the water rushed in over the side. They must surely be capsized. Again they felt that horrible tremor as the thin bark tapped the side of the rock; but the pressure stopped there, and they knew that they had again escaped destruction as by a miracle.

Peter Dick swallowed something that seemed to have formed in his throat, and despite the drenching spray, and their moist condition generally, he felt his throat and lips parched as with a fever. He could not have uttered a word of rejoicing even if he had tried to.

It was the usually stoical and undemonstrative Little Dog who gave the first sign of victory. As they headed with a clear course downstream, he raised his paddle in air for one brief moment and gave it a little flourish.

Three minutes later they shot all at once out of the gloomy canyon into what was in all reality the world of light and day. And what a world! It was as if Nature had gone mad, or set apart a spot where she could amuse herself by fashioning bizarre-coloured freaks in clay. There was no herbage, but a maze of gigantic pillar-like rocks, interspersed with smooth bare cones resembling sugar-loaves, powdered and glistening with mica. There were bulbous-shaped monstrosities resembling mushrooms or uncouth antediluvian monsters, all painted with rainbow hues, but in well-defined and parallel bands. On either hand the precipitous sides of a valley opened out, also streaked with those wonderful tints. This spot had been Nature's crucible, and the clays had been baked till the chemicals in the soil had reverted to primary colour, those of the rainbow, where Nature—God's hand—reveals the pigments with which she paints. Attrition—the action of wind and water—had then chiselled and carved the great masses of clay

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already treated by fire, with the result that the whole was a thousand times more fantastic and grotesque than anything the mind of man ever conceived. There were curiously fashioned temples, fretted spires, and griffin-like gargoyles jutting from the face of the cliff, while on the level there were more strange shapes than ever a madman conjured up.

Peter Dick gazed spell-bound on the wild scene.

Even Little Dog, who had doubtless often seen it before, stayed his paddle to gaze curiously upon it.

He turned and looked at the boy.

"Funny place that," he commented.

"Funny is hardly the right word," said Peter. "It's too much like a bad dream to be exactly humorous. What do they call this place?"

Little Dog told him that the English equivalent signified the Devil's Playground.

"And a jolly good name, too," commented Peter. "Hello, what's that?"

But Little Dog at the same moment had caught sight of the two men who stood outlined against the grey of a distant terrace.

"Ough! ough!" exclaimed Little Dog, obviously excited. "We must get under these

rocks before they see us, and we must stop brothers Jim and Big Head. But here they are."

"Whom do you think it is?" asked Peter, as the Indian with a few deft strokes of the paddle shot into a little backwater in cover of the high bank.

"Those whom we seek!" replied Little Dog. "These are doubtless the two men whom Redfish and his cut-throats left behind in charge of John Thorne."

"But where is John Thorne, and what can they have done with him?" asked Mr. Tapper musingly.

And then a sudden tempest of anger seemed to seize him. He smote a mighty palm against his right thigh, and exclaimed:

"But we'll soon see; and let them look out if anything has happened to my friend!"

And here it is necessary to tell what happened to John Thorne when he had been intercepted by Redfish and his gang, and, in trying to escape, had been knocked down and rendered unconscious.

CHAPTER XVI

STRANGE DOINGS

WHEN John Thorne, the rancher, came to himself, which must have been in a very few minutes, he was sitting bolt-upright between a couple of the coatless ruffians. His arms and feet were fastened securely, if comparatively loosely, to his sides. What impressed him most of all was that they were fording the great Saskatchewan, and already the water was beginning to cover his boots. Three or four of the kidnappers were on horseback and splashing around him. A voice he seemed to know was saying :

"Yes, if you could only have an accident, Mons, it would save a deal of trouble. You two chaps can swim anyhow."

John Thorne was not particularly afraid of death, but the cold-blooded suggestion, and the thought of "the rat in the drain" sort of ending to his career, struck a chill through him. It was Redfish who had spoken.

"Oh no, boss," said the man on his right.

"Why don't you come and sit alongside him yerself if you want an accident? Always loading the gun you are, and getting some one else to fire it. I'm not going to do it, then letting you have the cinch on me afterwards, you bet."

"What the dickens did I let you into the scheme at all for?" asked Redfish. "Do you take me for a blooming philanthropist?"

"You!—Ge-whitaker!" exclaimed the kidnapper. "No; I'll tell you why you asked us to go in with you. You've got the top-piece, you have, and the 'magination to murder a score of men, but your liver's straw-coloured, and you're a bit superstitious—and a good job for most of us, I say; for, by the Lord Harry, if you warn't, I for one wouldn't sleep soundly in my little bed of a night with you mouching around."

Redfish only indulged in a hard nasal cackle, and the water becoming deeper, and threatening to overturn the buggy, created a diversion that put an end to the conversation. The rancher thought it odd that they did not dispose of him then and there. It would have saved them such a lot of trouble later on. He probably owed his good fortune to that same reason which has saved many a man and woman in a like situation. They were afraid of one another in so

far as they knew that Redfish was utterly devoid of any moral sense, and they also knew that if once he got the pull of murder over any one he would be ruthless in his exercise of that power. They knew very well that he was a heartless scoundrel, and would not hesitate to throw his own brother overboard to serve his own ends. And Redfish more than suspected they knew it, and so was on his guard. He doubtless had sufficient knowledge of human nature to know that, now they had started on their scheme, they were speedily bound to incriminate themselves. He could afford to wait.

The river was crossed, and the kidnappers started due north. Where they intended to take him to he did not know; for, of course, in such a vast country there were lots of places where a regiment of soldiers could camp for a year and not be seen or heard of. He thought they would make for the Bad Lands, and he was right, for they soon began to shape their course to the westward again, and he knew that, probably before the day was over, or at least next day, they would be abreast Pasqua again, though with the river and a range of hills between.

But he was not going to submit to being kidnapped in such a barefaced fashion, and he made

an effort to free himself. But one of his guards seized him roughly, and gave him a shake that convinced him he was a man of no ordinary strength.

"Darn you," exclaimed this worthy, "don't be a fool an' make things onpleasant fer yerself! You're our prisoner now, an' as we've shown our hand, you don't suppose we're sich fools as let you go back home again to git us into trouble. Don't you think it for one minit."

"You're giving yourselves a lot of trouble for nothing," said Thorne. "Rather than do what that blackguard Redfish wants me to I'd prefer to be shot. None of you will get a penny out of me save what you can find in my pockets, and that is about enough to give each of you a day's board and lodging."

Redfish, who was riding alongside overheard him. His steel-blue eyes shone angrily. Still, with good command over himself, he said:

"You're pretty good at keeping everything to yourself, aren't you? And you tried to keep the news secret that you had struck oil, too. Wanted everything for yourself. There's only one way to deal with selfish fellows like you."

"You know very well that you had every chance of going in with me if you had wanted

to," retorted the rancher. "If you expected to risk nothing and only come in for profits you were mistaken."

"Oh no, I wasn't," retorted Redfish, with impudent assurance. "I'm not a fool, and never give a penny without expecting to get two in return for it. Besides, since you're on that tack, you seem to forget that people know very well that you and I have been partners, although you remember you took exception to their saying so the other day. And I may as well tell you—seeing you may want to change your mind about those signatures—that I intend to prove that you've fooled away your share in both ranch and boring operations long ago, and that unless I had come to the rescue with my own money—which I can certainly prove—you'd have been out of the district long ago."

"And so you're going in for forgery, too!" observed Thorne. "You'll have a nice old charge-sheet against you when you come to answer for your doings. And don't be such a fool as to suppose that, if you effectually disposed of me to-morrow, a dozen witnesses—even the men you are with now, and who hate you like poison as it isn't difficult to see—will bowl you out in the end. You're a fool to suppose

that merely getting rid of me will prevent your crime being discovered. Man alive, you are a fool!"

And Redfish really did seem to him such a fool just then that his rage died away. He realised it was impossible for his bold and outrageous scheme to succeed. Even if those kid-nappers killed him, it was a moral certainty that some of them would hold the knowledge of the fact over the guilty heads of the others, in order to extort more than their full share of the plunder, or to blackmail them. There could not possibly be mutual trust or fair dealing with such a crew. What troubled him most of all was that his nephew Jim, with a younger brother or a friend, should come to the ranch when he was away, and have to listen to the lies that were sure to be told about him.

He had thought that an opportunity of escaping would present itself before long, but he was disappointed. They watched him closely day and night, and at last the strain told upon his nerves. He began to get jumpy and fanciful. The only one of the crew who treated him as he thought with a hint of sympathy was a man called Bill Poddy. He found he was not at all a bad sort of fellow, though at times he appeared

to be not altogether "there." The rancher knew that this individual once had a very terrible experience on the Peace River. He had got storm-stayed with his mates, and saw them all die through exposure and want of food, though those who at last found him declared he must have behaved on that occasion like a hero. They said he must have starved himself and have done everything in his power to alleviate the sufferings of his comrades, for when he was discovered by the Royal North-West Mounted Police he was seated beside one of his dead comrades with a crust of bread in his hand, trying to feed the corpse—and that while he himself was actually famishing. It was a noble situation, if a ghastly one, and the result was disastrous, for since then Poddy had not been himself. He had been a great chess and draught player, but he had utterly lost his natural aptitude for these games, although by some ironical fate his desire to play remained.

If it had not been for Poddy the rancher realised it would have gone hard with him, for Redfish, with fiendish cunning, had given strict orders that no one was to speak to him. If he spoke to any one, the person he addressed pretended not to hear. This system of enforced

silence, as most people know, is calculated to break a man down mentally very quickly. He was not even allowed to hear the others talk. When in camp he was generally sent some fifty yards or so out of earshot in charge of one of them, who practically covered him with a rifle the whole time. Redfish had given strict injunctions that he was to be shot down if he made an attempt to escape. Thorne thought some one would be tempted to shoot him so as to save all future worry. Only because he knew they were looking for the slightest excuse to kill him, he would not have submitted as he did. This made him all the more careful and determined to survive the ordeal, so that he might get even with the scoundrels in the end.

It was Poddy who, whenever he got beyond earshot of his comrades, behaved decently to him. Indeed, he had some difficulty in understanding why Poddy attached himself to those blackguards at all, although outwardly he appeared to be quite as great a ruffian as his mates. Apart from certain of his hobbies he was sensible enough, but in one particular he was entirely misleading. His appearance suggested, and his speech certainly led one to believe, that he was

a desperado of the bloodthirsty type. He doubtless endeavoured to encourage this misconception. No doubt Redfish, ever prone to believe the worst of people by reason of his own moral obliquity, was taken in by his almost stagey appearance, and imagined that he would prove a willing tool. Like a good many more big men with childlike sides to their characters, Poddy was astute enough to divine the rogue's estimate of him, and laid himself out to profit by it. When the others were around, and Poddy had occasion to address the prisoner, he would do so in a surly and almost brutal fashion; but when with John Thorne he was quite a different man, although his form of speech was much the same. The rancher soon had an example of this.

Poddy had been told off to take charge of him when the others went out on a scouting expedition, and to get some game to replenish their food supply. He was somewhat apprehensive when Poddy ordered him in a vindictive way to march before him to a narrow gully with high sides, where, he declared, he would be the better able to pot him if he meditated a dash for liberty. His manner seemed so sinister that the rancher thought Redfish had at last prevailed on him

to take the opportunity of putting an end to him.

The others had no sooner left than a strange change came over his jailer. He winked in a ponderous fashion, and jerking his thumb in the direction his comrades had taken, observed:

"Blooming idyeots the whole boiling of them. Not an ounce of pluck amongst the lot—and not one of them as is game to take me on at draughts!"

"What!" said Thorne, at first somewhat mystified; and then, with an inspiration, "You must be a bit of a terror at the game. At the same time, I'd like to meet the man I'd be afraid to tackle, though I haven't played for quite a long time."

"You think you can play!" exclaimed Poddy, with disparagement in his voice. "You really think you're good enough to tackle Bill Poddy! Waal now, we'll jolly soon find out what you can do."

"All right," said the rancher; "if you think I'm afraid of you, you make a mighty big mistake. Mind, I'm not saying I can beat you, but I'm not going to allow you to say so until you've done it."

"Waal, if you ain't a plucky one!" was the

seemingly pleased exclamation. "But I'll take you down a peg or two, my bold hero, and don't you forget it."

Next minute, with his rifle resting against his body, and both eyes on his prisoner, Mr. Poddy was groping in a sack-like pocket for something. After removing what appeared to be a spare shirt and various odds and ends, he drew forth a small folding draught-board with obvious pride. From a leather pouch on his belt, which was supposed to contain cartridges, he produced the men. He motioned John Thorne to sit down opposite, and then, placing his rifle so that it was impossible for his prisoner to get at it without overpowering him, he placed the pieces and began operations by making the first move. The odd thing was that he reversed the usual mode of procedure in the game, and made it a condition that victory was to belong to the one who could contrive to lose his men first.

This took the rancher somewhat aback, and he found this method a great deal more trying and difficult than he had imagined. At first he was all at sea about his opponent's play, and did not realise that what he supposed to be deeply-thought-out moves were really very short-sighted ones. The result was that he blundered badly.

As a matter of fact, Poddy's very indifferent playing was such that it baffled any sane method to deal with it. The rancher could not at first accustom himself to the topsy-turvydom of the methods. He had always been considered a fair player, but owing to the peculiarity of the situation, and giving his opponent credit for tactics which did not exist, he lost. His adversary was hugely delighted. He slapped the board with his open fist, and roared in triumph.

"You thought you could play!" he exclaimed. "Why, you can't play for sour apples! You're a poor sort of chap to tackle a man like Bill Poddy!"

"I'm afraid I'm rather off," admitted John Thorne apologetically. "Got a bit of a headache this morning; but I think if I had a little practice it would take you all your time to do it again."

"Borack!" snorted Poddy, "you can't play for nuts, I tell you. Did you say you were off colour? Well, I guess we'll celebrate this business with a pannikin of tea. Set to, and we'll have a bit of a picnic you and me; but none of your tricks, mind. Bill Poddy ain't goin' to be caught on the hop, you bet."

And with all his childlike artlessness, the jailer never once gave his prisoner a chance of turning the tables on him. Though he helped

Thorne to gather sticks and remake the fire, he held his rifle so that there could be no surprising him. He marched him down to the creek and made him fill the kettle; and, in point of fact, the situation was so unique and absurd that it took the prisoner's mind for the time being from his miserable plight.

They had tea, and the whole affair was quite a little picnic. Poddy was unconsciously one of the most entertaining fellows John Thorne had ever met, although at times some of his speeches and ways were decidedly puzzling and disconcerting. There were brief periods when his manner and speech would be quite that of a normal man, and then he would suddenly lapse as if a cloud had passed over him. He was undoubtedly suffering from some local mental disturbance, which some day might pass away for good and leave him in a normal condition.

As if in proof of this, Poddy would not play any more that day, but seemed to derive considerable entertainment in twitting his prisoner with what he was pleased to call his cock-sureness in being able to beat him, and his ignominious collapse. Still, John Thorne spent the most bearable two or three hours he had yet done since his enforced stay with the kidnappers.

Next day they had an opportunity of being together again, and on this occasion John Thorne succeeded in beating his jailer, although he found the peculiar method of play a by no means pleasant way of exercising his brains. To his surprise, Mr. Poddy was so put out at being defeated that he was very sorry indeed he had beaten him. Mr. Poddy upset the men and the board, called his prisoner so many funny names, and took the whole silly business so seriously, that John Thorne was obliged to laugh at him.

Then he thought he had hastened his own end, for his jailer fumed and abused him until, in sheer desperation, he offered to give him satisfaction, and heroically sat down to the board again, albeit playing with him was one of the most excruciating ordeals one could well imagine.

But more serious things than such sporting ordeals were soon to claim his attention.

CHAPTER XVII

THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE ENEMY

WHEN Mr. Tapper and the boys caught sight of the two strange men across the valley, they found it was not so easy to approach them as Mr. Tapper had imagined, for the very simple reason that they stood on a terrace on the side of a gusset-shaped and narrow plateau which rose sheer up from the broken country, and there was no visible means of scaling it. The party lay down behind the sheltering bank, and Mr. Tapper took a long and careful survey of the position through his field-glasses. After what seemed to the boys an unconscionable time, he observed :

"It beats me how we are going to reach them. That tongue of land on which they stand seems to go back and widen out indefinitely."

"But there must be some way up," said Peter Dick.

"I don't suppose they used a balloon to get there," observed the practical Jim.

"What does Little Dog think?" asked Mr.

Tapper, who was by no means averse to listening to all sides before following up what would in all probability be his own view of the matter.

"I think that very likely their camp lies quite a long way from here," replied the Indian thoughtfully. "It is not unlikely that in the daytime they wander around and come to the point so as to look out for others whom they expect—those with whom we fought and overcame. It is a good sign, for if John Thorne was dead I do not think they would be here."

"I quite agree with you," broke in Mr. Tapper. "They wouldn't be here if Mr. Thorne was dead. They'd be all in at Pasqua forcing that wretched Redfish to realise on the estate and the oil prospects. You can bet they wouldn't want to delay handling their share of the spoil."

"Perhaps they couldn't agree amongst themselves as to who was to do the actual killing," observed Jim; "and so to gain time, and make sure of Redfish paying up, some of them went back with him to the settlement while two of them stayed behind with the intended victim."

"And Redfish probably hoped that the two villains, getting tired of their charge, would have him killed before they returned," observed Mr. Tapper. "Yes, our chief hope lies in the fact

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of their mutual distrust. Had they only trusted one another, John Thorne would have been dead long ago. But we must not build on anything. What we've got to do now is to catch those rascals and find out what they've done with our friend."

"And to do that we must keep out of sight," said Little Dog. "I only hope they haven't seen us already. As all this country is like the comb of the honey-bee, there are lots of places where we can hide. We must go into hiding now, and to-night Big Head and I will go out and endeavour to discover a path leading up to the bench,¹ and find out what we can."

But, to the great disgust of the party the two men on the height remained where they were until evening; and so, as it would have been useless for any one to have attempted to find a pathway up the side of that far-stretching and apparently unbroken line of cliff in the darkness, they were reluctantly obliged to stay where they were until next day.

While it was hardly yet light, they carried the canoes to a little break in the hillside and concealed them. They realised that although it would have saved them many a weary mile of marching to sail downstream, it would be im-

¹ Plateau.

possible to do so without being seen. It would also, in such a case, be so easy for any one to ambush them. They also sought out an overhanging ledge at the foot of the cliff, and which was well screened by undergrowth, where they might make a camp and run little or no risk of detection.

But two more days passed, and they were unable to find a path leading upwards, or near a spot which it would be possible to climb.

"This won't do," exclaimed Mr. Tapper, when on the third evening he returned from a fruitless exploration of the rugged face of the plateau. "We must shift camp and sail downstream. We must be nearer our work. Redfish and his gang have almost had time to recruit and be after us again. You see, although it is a good deal longer to come round by trail, with horses—and Redfish would see to that—they could travel by night as well as day, and so our short cut would be considerably discounted."

A little later that same evening when the moon rose, they put their scanty belongings into the canoes and started downstream again. It was dangerous work, but the two Indians could see like cats in the dark, so that when close to the bows of the canoes they caught sight of a ghostly

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phosphorescent gleam, by a deft stroke of the paddle they would avoid some dangerous rock. When they had gone several miles they halted, and drew their canoes ashore and into a thicket of saskatoon bushes at the foot of the cliff. It had been a weird journey down that valley of strange shapes in coloured clays. At times the boys could quite have imagined themselves in some old-world canal threading the ruined temples and palaces of an ancient city, and it was a suggestive, melancholy sight to note the deserted quays and wharves. Every now and again they caught sight of fearsome and uncouth prehistoric animals and reptiles lurking and sprawling along the bank. So realistic were they that they startled one with a suggestion of intelligent design. Here was a griffin, and there a winged dragon. A little farther on was a huge, ungainly animal of the mastodon type, and close to it a gigantic loathly saurian with its mouth all agape, crawling out of a slimy pool. It was a weird, uncanny place, especially by moonlight.

In a recess of the gulch or *coulée* they proceeded to light a fire and make a kettle of tea. In the dry, rarefied air of certain inland countries tea or coffee is almost a necessity of existence. While they were thus engaged, Little Dog had

gone out by himself to a high rock about half a mile distant to look about him. As he gazed around on the weird moonlit scene, he suddenly drew himself together and, inclining his head, listened intently. Then he hurried down to the plain, and putting an ear to the ground, listened as a cat might to hear the approach of a mouse.

Yes, he could just distinguish them—the faint drumming of horses' hoofs. The sound did not come borne on air waves, but by the medium of the earth itself. He could hear them just as the beating of his own heart. He knew there were at least several horsemen.

He ran to a point a few hundred yards farther to the north, and there amid a jumble of rocks he hid. No need to put an ear to the ground now; he could make out the hoof-beats distinctly, and the occasional jingle and clank of the heavy Mexican bits in the horses' mouths.

A few minutes later they passed within a couple of hundred yards of him, and made for a deep wooded gully that cut into the plateau. He could even distinguish the forms of the riders by reason of the wan moonlight. At first he was consumed with apprehension lest they should catch sight of any reflection from the fire his companions had lit. But the latter had guarded against any such con-

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tingency, and the danger point was safely passed. He watched them disappear, and after carefully noting their route he deserted his point of vantage and ran back to where he had left his comrades.

"Brothers," he said, "the enemy has returned, and to-morrow I go alone to find out what they have done with John Thorne. It may be that they have not made up their minds yet what to do with him, but in any case we must reckon with them. We can have no difficulty in following up their tracks."

CHAPTER XVIII

LITTLE DOG OVERREACHES HIMSELF

DOUBTLESS Little Dog slept more soundly than any one in camp that night. We civilised white folk talk about the poor Red man and are inclined to pity him, but we forget that we have lost a good deal—if also we have gained much—by civilisation, and that the Indian is at least not sufficiently worried by shallow so-called philosophies to doubt the existence of the Happy Hunting Grounds awaiting him after death. Little Dog was, therefore, not particularly afraid of the Hereafter.

Long ere it was light he had made his way up the gully where he had seen the white men go. He knew he could pick their tracks up on the plateau above. He had told the others to possess their souls in patience and wait till he came back. He was in extraordinarily good spirits, for he realised he would be for a while out of the controlling influence of Mr. Tapper's quixotic notions anent the sanctity of human life.

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He was even jocular. In his driest manner he advised Big Head to curb for the time being his adventurous instincts, and not to run unnecessary risks while he was gone. His worthy comrade, he declared, had always been foolhardy.

Little Dog stepped out right blithely. He knew he could go as far, if not as fast, as a horse any day, and he intended to locate his enemies, discover their full strength, find out the whereabouts of their prisoner John Thorne, and then come back and direct the others, so that his release could be effected before the enemy would have time to take revenge on their prisoner. He realised that one man would be comparatively safe to reconnoitre where two or more would only imperil their chances.

The gully, as he had surmised, led right up to the plateau, though the last two or three hundred yards were exceedingly rough and difficult to negotiate. But he knew the bronchos, or prairie horses, could climb like jack-rabbits, so he was not surprised at the difficulties the route presented.

When he reached the top the dawn was breaking, and he paused to regain his breath and look upon the magnificent panorama of gleaming river and lake and rolling prairie. A flush as of the faint pink of pearl crept over the greens and

greys of the hillside, and the soul of the savage stirred in response to that untutored æstheticism slowly developing within him.

Little Dog picked up the trail of the horsemen of the previous night. There was no difficulty in doing that. Indeed, by the tracks he learned that they were eight in number, that all their horses were shod, but that one had cast a shoe. He also amused himself by determining the probable time that had elapsed since certain of the horses had been at the blacksmith's. He also noted that one of them was lame, seeing that its off hind hoof just lightly toed the ground and no more. That horse had probably corns, or had hurt itself on a stone. The plateau was quite different from what one might have expected, looking at it from the rolling prairie or the valley beneath. It was densely wooded in places with great belts of pines, and it was odd to note the distribution of the long, barren patches on which no timber grew. These, for all the world, resembled natural avenues. One well-known example in the North-West Territories of this convenient arrangement occurs on the Cypress Hills, some twenty miles south of that picturesquely situated little town called Medicine Hat, and is appropriately termed The Avenue.

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But Little Dog knew better than take advantage of such roads. It would be so easy for any one suspecting the presence of an enemy to surprise him. He therefore made things rather difficult for himself by keeping in the timber, and only going out into the open occasionally to see that the tracks were there. For two hours he travelled in this fashion, his progress naturally being slow. When he grew hungry he cut small portions off the jerked venison he carried and chewed them as he went along. He came to a place where the plateau dipped towards the river. In places, indeed, the ledge above it was so inconsiderable that the tops of the high trees underneath were almost on a level with the ground. Little Dog was taking what he considered would prove a short cut, when suddenly he came upon a grassy hollow into which crept a straggling undergrowth, and there, sitting close to a natural spring, were the eight men whom he was shadowing. There was a fire burning, and over it was slung a couple of camp-kettles, one probably containing meat and the other water for tea. Picketed hard by were their horses. Amongst the men Little Dog recognised Redfish and two or three more well known in Pasqua. They were evidently busily discussing something of importance, and consider-

able warmth was shown by one or two members of the party.

Little Dog became very curious indeed to learn what they were talking about, although, of course, he had a shrewd suspicion as to the subject under discussion. It was only second nature to him to glance around and note the best means available for the purpose of eavesdropping. The straggling sage brush and bracken caught his eye.

Next moment he had become the hunter, and was crawling on his belly through the tangled grass and brush. Every instinct within him was quickened, and the human seemed to revert to the reptile. He was as noiseless as a shadow, and his body glided through the herbage without apparent effort. Nearer and nearer to the group he crawled, until he could hear their remarks distinctly.

"Better chuck the whole job than have so much shinanikin about it," said one of them. "I can't for the life of me see how we're going to scoop the pool if he's allowed to live."

"And that's what I say," said another. "It means a rope round the neck of every mother's son of us that may tighten at any moment if he's left alive"

"That's all very well," broke in a third, whom Little Dog recognised as Redfish; "but who is going to do it? You all say 'Finish him off,' but

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none of you offer to do it. It strikes me I've done more than my share already."

"And you've got the handle end of the whip, so to speak," said another. "You've got everything in your own name, and 'ow are we to know as 'ow you won't stick to it, and tell us to go and whistle for our share, when once we've done the trick for you? No; we'd like to see you 'ave a finger in the pie, too."

"Then what did I ask your help for at all?" almost screamed Redfish. "If you want me to do everything, I guess I'd better have played a lone hand."

"You got us because, although you'd the head to do the scheming, you hadn't the grit to do the killing," said the first speaker, with pitiless candour. "It wasn't because you hadn't the mind to, but because there's a considerable touch of the white feather about you. If you'd only been man enough to do the killing yourself, it ain't likely you'd have asked our help."

"Then what have you done, and what do you suppose I asked your help for?" cried Redfish, beside himself with rage. "Do you suppose I asked you to have a hand in this from motives of sheer philanthropy? It seems to me I made a big mistake in taking you into my confidence at all. I thought I was dealing with men——"

"Draw it mild, mister and stow that! Say it again and I'll show you——"

"Look here," broke in another, who had not hitherto spoken. "Quarrellin' ain't going to put this matter any forrarder so far as I kin see. Mister Thorne is wid our two mates not three miles from this. I propose we puts him into a hole in the face of the cliff, and each man takes a stone and builds up that hole, and then every one will be alike, and there'll be no shinanikin or callin' names. It ain't right that one should have the drop on t'other in a bizness like this."

"That's the ticket — that's fair horny!" exclaimed some one with a high-pitched nasal voice. "Build him up in a cave and let him die his bloomin' self.—Hello! what's that?"

For the first time in his life Little Dog had overreached himself. In his anxiety to catch all that was being said he had crawled just a little too near, and a twig springing back into its place had betrayed his presence.

Next moment the conspirators were on their feet, and eight rifles or revolvers were pointed at the suspected spot.

"Come out o' that and show yourself," cried one of them. "We've got the dead drop on you!"

CHAPTER XIX

CAUGHT !

WHEN Little Dog saw that he was fairly caught his first impulse was to make a fight for it. But he quickly realised the folly of such proceedings. He knew he would be riddled in double-quick time if he did anything of the sort. Besides, he had left his rifle in the sage brush before he began to do the serpent business, and he rightly judged he could not reach it in time.

He pulled himself together and got up. It required all the stoicism of the Indian to face that cruel and cowardly crew. Cowardly, because there was one thing that, like most of their kind, they feared, and that was the rope. Still, where a Redskin was concerned their scruples regarding the sixth commandment were not quite so circumscribed as if he had been white. They crowded around, and pointed their various weapons at him with a touching disregard of one another's proximity. It was Redfish who rose superior to the senseless flow of abuse that greeted the hapless one, and asked the first practical question.

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"What are you doing here, Nichè?" he asked. "I can't say I exactly know you; you're all so confoundedly alike. What were you doing in the sage brush?"

"I must have been asleep, Brother," replied the wily little Indian, with a confused but apparently disingenuous smile. "The day was hot, and I crawled into the shade. Have you just come up?"

His reply and request for information were received with ironical jeers and much warmly worded language. Redfish gazed around upon the group.

"Do any of you know this Redskin?" he asked.

"Yes," said two of the most disreputable-looking ones simultaneously; "it's Little Dog, an Assiniboine Indian that sometimes comes into Pasqua."

"Ah, a spy, of course, you lying dog! Where are those you are with?" hazarded Redfish, with a clever assumption of knowledge. "We know you went out with that meddlesome beggar Tapper and those two brats of boys. Where are they now?"

Redfish shifted his rifle significantly from one hand to the other and examined the trigger.

But Little Dog evidently did not understand everything that was said to him in English,

although he spoke it fairly well. Suddenly a look of enlightenment overspread his wizened face, and with apparently pleased readiness he replied :

"Ah, you mean the white man they call Timo Tapper—the man who makes a noise in his throat like the bull-moose when he is angry, and whose laugh sounds like the noise of the wind when it comes in at the open tee-pee¹ door and goes out by what you call the chimney! He and those two big piccaninnies I saw the other day in a canoe on the bosom of the Kissaskatchewan before I crossed the big divide. But there were many other canoes with them, and many of the Mounted Police."

A perfect storm of laughs and jeers greeted this assertion, and one man—a loose-jointed, sinister-faced fellow with the double attraction of a hare-lip and a squint—jocularly gave him a sharp dig in the ribs with the muzzle of his rifle, and remarked :

"Bully for you, pard! You're first cousin to Ananias and no mistake.—Boys, I wouldn't wonder if this here Injun warn't one o' them as give you gruel t'other night."

Little Dog turned and gazed upon his unlovely accuser with a pained look of surprise.

¹ Wigwam.

"Brothers," he said, "I am always ready to give you gruel if you are hungry, but alas, it is little enough food I have for myself these days!"

Some of the ribald crew laughed, but the suspicious one persisted.

"Hark at the gammon of the red dog!" he exclaimed. "Where is your gun, Nichè?"

"What need have I of a gun when I come out to set snares?" replied Little Dog, with a show of scorn; and he inwardly prayed that no one would happen to stumble across his Remington lying in the sage-brush. Fortunately his cartridge-belt was lying beside it.

"Nichè," observed Redfish, "I don't believe a single word you say. I wouldn't believe you if you went down on your knees. I'm ready to swear I saw you with that fellow Tapper."

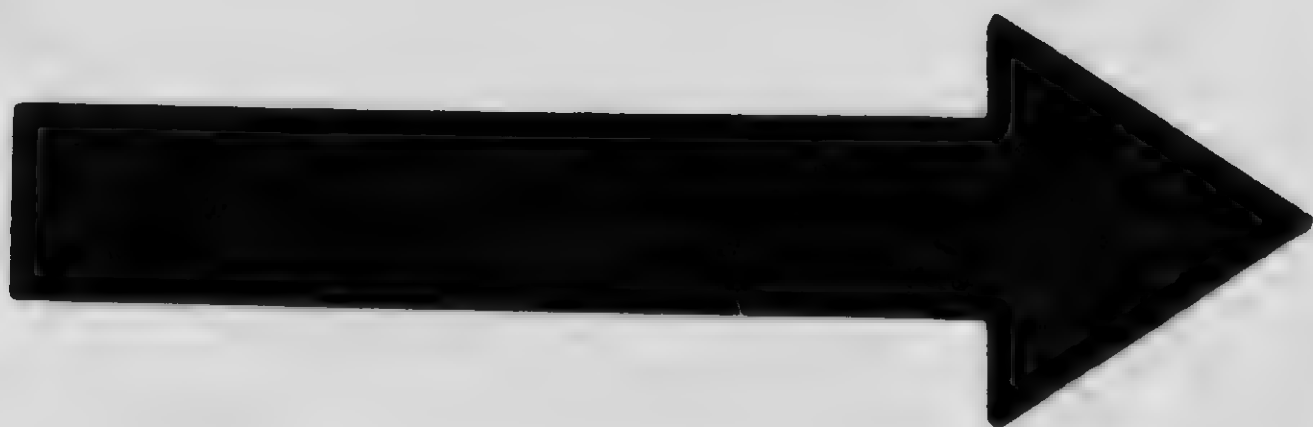
"To look at you, brother, I would say there was nothing you were not ready to swear to," sweetly remarked Little Dog who was now getting not a little annoyed owing to the indignities he was subjected to. If they meant to kill him, why did the wretched crew not set about it properly?

Redfish became hot and cold with annoyance as the laugh went up against him. He could not quite believe that a Red man possessed a soul like a white one, therefore if this unpleasant-tongued

Indian was killed it would be much the same thing as disposing of some troublesome cur. Besides, the Red man had been listening, and what he may have heard might be enough to upset their plans and hang the lot of them. This was also a good opportunity of showing those around him—and whom he cordially detested—that he could be a man of iron if need be. He had somewhat lost caste amongst them lately.

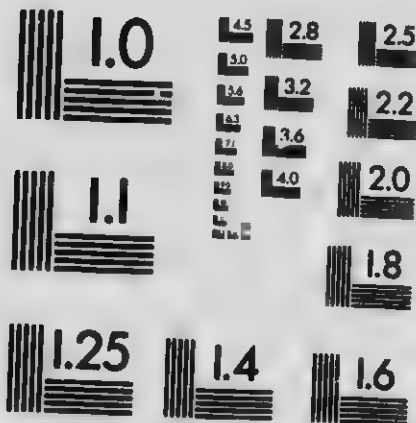
"Look here, men," he said; "we came out on this trip to go through with the business. This red beggar lies. I have seen him with Tapper and the boys, and I am almost certain I caught sight of him that night when those wretched people caught us on the hop. Can't we get the truth out of him by giving him a taste of the grill"—glancing suggestively at the fire—"or something of that sort to refresh his memory? Confound them, but they did give us beans the other night!" And Redfish felt queer when he thought of it, and the thirst for revenge so possessed him that, he actually took advantage of Little Dog's helpless position to give him a smart blow on the side of the head with his closed fist.

Next moment Little Dog's hand was on the handle of his sheath-knife, and the Indian would most assuredly have paid for his little burst of passion



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with his life had not a suspicious kidnapper who was taking an active interest in the proceedings stayed his hand just in time, and wrenched the weapon from him. Next moment there was an angry outburst from the rabble, and they realised that the time had passed to observe the usual formalities with this obstreperous prisoner. If they could not get some information from him, they would at least not suffer him to remain a menace to their safety. They did not desire a repetition of the harrowing circumstances of the previous week. They promptly seized and subjected him to such violent handling that Little Dog made sure his last hour had come. He glanced around, and took in the physical features of his position. They were, as has been said, in a species of hollow, one side being bounded by the river which flowed some fifty or sixty feet below. The bank was quite precipitous at this point.

They placed Little Dog on the brink, with his back to the abyss. One quick glance only did the Indian take at the deep reach beneath ere they wheeled him round so as to face them. A few gaunt pines were in his immediate neighbourhood. The enemy went back several paces so as to form a half-circle and cut off his escape, if by chance he meditated any such mad scheme.

There seemed no earthly hope for him now. Those straggling pines, however, were somewhat in the way. The officious villain stood nearest to him so as to jog him in the ribs if his memory wanted quickening. Redfish conducted the proceedings, and under the one-sided circumstances he was eminently qualified for the position. He lost no time in proceeding to business.

"Your name, I understand, is Little Dog," he said in his high-pitched nasal voice, "though if they had called you Coyote it would have been even more appropriate. You have been caught in the act of spying upon us, and you have just been prevented using your knife. You have only one chance of saving your life, and that is by answering our questions truthfully. In the first place, how did you get here, and where are your friends?"

CHAPTER XX

THE SUBTLETY OF LITTLE DOG

LITTLE DOG had become apparently apathetic and even resigned to his fate. One who did not know him would have said that the menacing death did not particularly trouble him. What was death, after all, to an Indian who longed for the Happy Hunting Grounds, more particularly as, now that the white man had overrun his country, the buffalo had disappeared? He glanced wearily around, and to look at him as he stood there—a spare, hunched-up, seemingly elderly savage, lacking the dignity and bearing of his kind—one might have been tempted to aver that he was a foeman hardly worthy of one's steel. He appeared to be a spiritless savage, and one to whom it was a bore to have to answer questions. Still, there was that in his speech which stirred one strangely when one came to mentally digest it.

“White man,” said Little Dog, “I am sorry I cannot return the compliments you pay me. Neither can I think that you are well named.

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You remind me more of the red fox than the smoked fish. You ask me what I am doing here. I answer I have a better right to the soil than you: I and my tribe were here before you. The chances are we shall be here after such as you are gone."

Redfish and his gang stood amazed at what they considered the unparalleled impudence of this wretched Redskin. But it was sheer absurdity to take him seriously. They must keep him to the point. The ragged rascal, thinking it incumbent on him to remind the captive of his perilous position, approached to dig him in the ribs with the muzzle of his rifle. This he successfully did, with hardly a gesture of dissent from his miserable victim. Little Dog was surely a poor creature after all.

"You haven't answered my questions yet," persisted Redfish. "What you speak of is of no earthly interest to us. The whites are here, and here they intend to remain. How did you get here to begin with?"

"I took a flint stone, and after having greased it, slid down on a rainbow that made an arch over the great divide," replied Little Dog solemnly.

Redfish drew his breath quickly, and the others did not know whether to laugh or lose their

tempers. They met the situation by indulging in a serious of dog-like snarls. The awry-eyed rascal poked him in the ribs again.

"You are only doing yourself harm by talking like that," said Redfish. "Before we riddle your useless carcass with bullets, where is that meddlesome fellow Tapper and those two big boys?"

"How can I tell, seeing I am not with them!" replied Little Dog.

"But you know where they are, and you could lead us to them," suggested Redfish.

"There are too many of you. They would become aware of your approach," replied Little Dog, who seemed to have been struck with the suggestion.

"We would not all go with you," explained Redfish. "One of us could accompany you, and we would follow at a safe distance so as to make sure you played no hanky-panky."

"That might do," observed Little Dog, passing his hand wearily over his forehead, as if weighing the pros and cons. "And you would promise me, if I led you to Tapper and the boys, to spare my life—that no harm would befall me?"

"Beggars cannot be choosers," exclaimed Redfish impatiently. "You make too many stipulations for one in your position, Little Dog."

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Nevertheless, we would spare your life. In fact, I think I can promise you that. What is more, you can choose the man who would accompany you."

"That is surely fair," said Little Dog meditatively. "At the same time, it goes against me somewhat to betray my friends. Still, I value my life, and as you say you will let me choose the man who will go with me, I accept your offer."

Still he seemed lost in thought, and made no move.

"Hurry up and choose your man," cried Redfish, impatiently stamping upon the ground with one foot.

At that same moment his ragged tormentor, as if to assist Little Dog in making up his mind, approached him with the evident intention of again poking him in the ribs with his serviceable rifle. As he did so an extraordinary change came over Little Dog. Quick as thought his right hand flew out and gripped the rifle barrel. Quicker than it takes to tell it, it was wrested from the hands of the surprised ruffian, and sent flying at the head of Redfish, who fell to earth like a smashed glass bottle. Then turning at the same instant, Little Dog caught the completely taken aback malefactor under the armpits, forced him

to the brink of the precipice, and sent him flying backwards into space and over it.

"That is the man I choose to go with me," cried the abject-looking little Indian. "You of the white livers, *au revoir!*" And next moment he had dived headlong from the rock.

Ere he did so a veritable fusillade took place. But it was all too late. The apparently decrepit and listless little man had so suddenly been transformed into an energetic fury that for the moment the conspirators had stood dumbfounded, and that moment gave Little Dog his chance. The whirling rifle that struck down Redfish so shook the nerves of those in the immediate neighbourhood that their shooting was wild. Moreover, Little Dog had gripped his victim so smartly afterwards that, had they fired as quickly as they might have done, the chances are both would have been shot.

When they ran to the brink, and looked over, they could see nothing but the violently disturbed surface of the long pool. Some of the rascally crew ran this way and some that, but several minutes elapsed before they could find a place by which they could clamber down, and then all they found was the body of their officious comrade, and it seemed devoid of life. There was not a trace of the Indian. They could not follow down



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the bank, for the very sufficient reason that it was little better than a tortuous gorge which would not permit of following. Those who descended waited, rifle in hand, to catch a glimpse of the body of Little Dog when it came to the surface; but it never appeared again. Utterly nonplussed, and vowing a thousand different kinds of vengeance on the little Indian who had made such fools of them, they returned to see if there was any life left in their unfortunate leader. When they thought of how they had allowed little Dog, under the guise of much simplicity or stupidity, to say most rude and impudent things to them, they were consumed with a species of blind passion that threatened to affect their healths.

The worst feature of the situation was that they did not know how much of their conversation Little Dog might have heard. The stupid, owl-like way in which the Indian had rubbed his eyes when he rose from the sage-brush had completely put them off their guard. They never before so fully realised the truth of the old adage about the only good Indian being a dead one.

Timothy Tapper, the boys, and Big Head sat in a species of cave anxiously awaiting the return of Little Dog. It was now quite dark, and they

began to think that something must assuredly have happened to the usually astute little Indian. If such was the case, then they would be very seriously handicapped indeed in their future operations. As it was, they were battling against tremendous odds. Redfish had so cleverly manipulated the situation, even going to the length of getting the advice of the Police upon the matter, that the representatives of the law naturally supposed Mr. Tapper to be either suffering from a delusion, or actuated by motives of pique or spite. The all-important question now was, could John Thorne be still alive? It was difficult to believe that the conspirators would be so near-sighted as to allow such an all-important witness against them to live. But, of course, there was just the possibility that they had been on a false trail from the very first—no one had actually seen John Thorne—and that the cold waters of the Saskatchewan held the secret of his fate.

Suddenly a peculiar low whistle, resembling that of a certain night-hawk, was heard outside.

"Little Dog!" exclaimed Big Head, and immediately repeated the call.

In a minute or two the little Indian stood before them, carrying his dripping wardrobe slung in a bundle across his back.

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"Ough! ough!" he exclaimed; "I have had a cold bath, and stayed rather too long in the water. If the valiant and hospitable Big Head will get me some hot tea, I will array myself in my Sunday clothes. We must go hence as soon as the moon rises, for I have found the place where John Thorne is."

CHAPTER XXI

JIM FALLS IN WITH THE ENEMY

"Is John Thorne alive or dead?" asked Mr. Tapper of Little Dog.

"I should say that depends largely on how his jailers have been faring in the matter of food," replied the little Indian philosophically. "If they have had no difficulty in obtaining fat grouse for the pot, they may have looked with a lenient eye upon him. Again, with only a little bad flour and worse bacon, or perhaps none at all, to encourage kindly thought, I should say they had sent our brother John Thorne to a land where game is exceedingly plentiful."

"Our brother John Thorne is alive," broke in Big Head with obvious conviction. "The night before last I dreamt that my grandmother came to me as I lay on my buffalo robe—thinking of the many Sioux scalps I had taken in the good old days, and said—'Big Head, my son, you will go into the Bad Lands, and there you will hear a voice calling. With your usual prowess you will follow

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it, wherever it may lead, until you discover him whom ye seek.'"

"Ough! ough!" exclaimed Little Dog. "And may the spirit of your grandmother sustain you when you hear that voice."

Big Head glanced sharply at his friend, but Little Dog's face bore as much expression as that on a street door-knocker.

"But you must first have some tea and something to eat, Little Dog," said Mr. Tapper, "and then you can tell us what there is to be told. We are rejoiced to see our brother back again. Jim and Peter, you will pack up the things and get ready for a start."

While they were getting ready Little Dog told them how he had been captured and made his escape. When he was led on to the terrace overlooking the river he had noted that, right underneath, the water appeared to be of considerable depth. His mind was made up in a moment; there was absolutely no other way out. It was a terrible leap, but of course it was worth risking. Anyhow, the death would not be a whit worse than that by the bullets of the miscreants. Moreover, he really could not delay squaring up accounts with the man who had tormented him. When he had sent the latter

spinning over the brink, he dived in true professional style. It was indeed tempting Providence, but he was wiry, and his skull was of the thickness peculiar to those of Mongolian descent.

He had dived somewhat downstream, so as to offer the least possible resistance to the current. He held his breath and was able to swim several yards before coming to the surface. Owing to its disturbed nature, his presence was not detected. A long breath and he was down again, swimming under water for all he was worth. A minute or two more and he was round the bend. He knew that he was now safe from observation. When he emerged from the water he divested himself of his wet clothing, and made his way back to camp. From various hints he had received when in the hands of the Redfish gang, he gathered that John Thorne was in all probability alive, but in the greatest peril. He knew the wild locality in which he was, and if they could only get there before Redfish they might save him. As to whether or not the foxy-faced leader had survived the blow from the rifle, he deemed his head had good powers of resistance. Doubtless his beauty had somewhat suffered, but red-haired people, he understood, had uncommonly good vitality.

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Little Dog having duly refreshed the inner man, and the canoes having been loaded up, they started in the moonlight. They disembarked a few miles lower down at the place where Little Dog had made his way up to the plateau, and there they unloaded, hiding the canoes in a sheltered gully where there was good natural concealment. They would henceforth have to proceed on foot, carrying their impedimenta in packs on their backs. These they had brought with them for that purpose. Each therefore, with a considerable load on his back, began the ascent leading to the chaotic plateau. They accomplished the climb without particular inconvenience.

When they neared the place where Little Dog had so nearly come to signal grief, that gentleman left the party in order to recover, if possible, the rifle he had left in the sage brush. This he succeeded in doing. He rejoined them, and reported that he had not been able to see anything of the enemy.

The greater part of that night they kept on their way. It was a weary, fatiguing march. The plateau sloped until it merged with the plain again, and once more they stood in the wild, grotesque valley of the Devil's Playground. They sought a dry nook in the side of a cliff, and

Tapper, Jim, and Big Head lay down to snatch a few hours' sleep before resuming what was pretty certain to prove a dangerous and arduous search for the missing man whose fate was shrouded by such mystery and tragic possibilities. As for Peter Dick and Little Dog, they went to a little rise commanding a view of the sleepers, and prepared to keep a look-out; for the latter averred that he had lain down and slept for a short time on his way back to the camp, as was his wont after passing through any unusual excitement, so he did not feel at all like sleeping now. Peter Dick said he did not feel like sleeping either, so thought he would keep Little Dog company. But this was only part of the truth, for the little Indian had promised to tell him a story of the old days—not so very long ago, either—when these prairies were uninhabited by the white man, when no Canadian Pacific Railway crossed Canada at its base, when vast herds of buffaloes passed from one part of these great plains to another, and when the various tribes, or rather nations, such as the Blackfoot, Crees, Piegans, Bloods, Assiniboines, Sarcees, and others led a free, wild life there, untroubled by land-grabbing whites, and only occasionally seeing a few buffalo-hunters or odd members of the Hudson Bay Company's staff, and with whom

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they were generally on good terms. Peter Dick, like any other healthy-minded British boy, had often longed for a taste of that wild, picturesque life, with its fascination inherited from a hunting ancestry, and albeit the one great object he and his companions now had in view was to find the missing John Thorne, he yet felt the glamour of those great unfettered spaces where still no white man dwelt. He knew Little Dog had been famous for his prowess in the many feuds that only a few years ago existed betwixt the tribes, and at odd times the boy had questioned him regarding them. When Little Dog found that Peter really took an intelligent interest in the past, and was not merely filled with an idle craving for entertainment of a sensational character, he told him many wonderful and fascinating stories such as he had never found in books of adventure—not even in those three experienced masters, Fenimore Cooper, Mayne Reid, and “Ballantyne the Brave.”

And, now as the two settled themselves comfortably on the mossy turf with their backs to the cliff, and overlooking the camp, Peter Dick asked Little Dog to tell him a true story of the days before the railway came into the country. Little Dog lit his pipe under a fold of his blanket, so

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that the flame might not be seen, and began without further parley.

LITTLE DOG'S TALE

"It is not so long ago since all this great land, from the Red River on the east to the Rockies on the west, and south and north, was one great hunting ground, as it is indeed still to the north, where, if you only go far enough, you will come to that country where the little people¹ live in huts half under the ground like the beaver or the gopher, where the reindeer drag the sleighs as our ponies here drag the *travaux* and Red River carts, and where the summer is so short that the sun does not think it worth while to go to bed, but keeps on shining all through the night to give those poor people a chance.

"All this land, I say, lay untilled and unmarked, and the only places of abode were the lonely and far-distant posts of the Hudson Bay Company and the teepees or huts of my kin down in the meadows by the silent, winding creek where the beaver builds his dam and the berries grow.

"Those were wild and troublous times, albeit the spirit that animated my kin was that which was natural to them, having grown up in their

¹ Esquimaux.

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hearts through countless generations, during which they had to hold their hunting grounds against others who, increasing in numbers, would fain have pressed in upon and robbed them of that by which they had to live.

"For this, those who are with us still have seen for themselves—that when the white man came amongst us, and ruthlessly slaughtered the buffalo, not that they might eat and live, but that they might sell the skins in distant lands, and leaving the good flesh—our food—to rot upon the ground, the Red man has had to seek for other means of livelihood, for which he is ill suited by reason of his former life. Moreover, when you have seen him like a child grappling with that which is beyond his years, you have lost patience with him, and said that he is no good, and looked down upon him. Yet I, Little Dog, who have lived much amongst you, and have even travelled on your iron ways drawn by the fiery monsters that go on wheels, have weighed even you white people who call yourselves civilised, and been astonished to find how much you have lost, if in other ways you have gained by your new modes of life.

"To you the voice of the Manitou has ceased to be a voice, so that they tell me some of you

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doubt if even there is a Manitou at all. Your churches have lost sight of the one great true message that speaks to us in everything that lives. You lose sight of the one great thing that matters, and squabble over the little outside things that bear no testimony and are of little account. For, Brother Peter, here is the one great truth as it seems to me—all the wealth and the beauty of living things, be they flowers or creatures as you see them, are but a voice and token of the goodness of the Manitou to His children.

“Moreover, the order and fitness such as you find in what you call Nature cannot be the result of what I have heard an ignorant white man say is ‘a blind law born of itself, without motive or design.’ Bah! laws so wise must be the outcome of an *Intelligence* a thousand times greater than the light of the sun as compared to the spark in this pipe—beyond doubt, that of a Spirit, the great Manitou Himself.

“But that is not what I wanted to tell, though at times in the lonely places I have thought of these things till I felt I must speak of them to some one. I am a Red man—‘a child of Nature,’ as I have heard your priests call me—but sometimes I think, as I listen to the rustle of the

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prairie grass as the unseen wind blows over it, that I understand and am nearer the great Planner and Creator of all things than you, who lose yourselves in the by-ways of vain imaginings.

"Be it so, Peter, and if in this tale that I am going to tell you, you say there is much that speaks of blood and the ways of the lower animals, remember we are indeed children as compared to your race, which for many generations has had wise men amongst you, and privileges denied to us. Until Father Lacombe came amongst us, many of us could only guess at the things which now we know are true.

"I was a young man, a newly made brave, some forty summers ago, and I was born near the place that is still called Medicine Hat, on the south branch of the Saskatchewan River, and near to the Cypress Hills. In those days the Blackfoot was a great and warlike people, men of great courage and stature, with a great chief just risen amongst them called Crowfoot. He it was who afterwards, by his great wisdom and courage, and the wise counsels of the priest, Father Lacombe, kept the Blackfoot from rising when Louis Riel stirred up the Crees and the Metis against the people of the great white mother, the Queen. Few white people in those days entered our country save to hunt

and to trade with the different tribes, and as the Blackfoot and the Crees often warred together, it was dangerous for a white man who was friendly with the Crees to go into the country of the Blackfoot. Many and bloody were the fights I saw between the two peoples, for the one was jealous of the other and cared not to have his boundaries made light of. And, as I have heard, that is no more than very old and civilised nations across seas still fight about, and with, perhaps, less cause. Still, there were times when the Crees and the Blackfoot held converse together, and met on terms of at least forbearance if not good will.

"In one of these visits, which with some other members of my tribe I had paid to the camp of Crowfoot near the Bow River, I had seen the daughter of a chief called Silver Horn, who was a brother of Crowfoot's, and she and I felt that though our people had long been enemies, still the great Manitou had never meant that we should hate each other. Rather indeed that we should love, and in that natural longing of heart for heart forget the foolish jealousies of peoples whose boundaries were fixed, and who had nothing to lose and much to gain by living peacefully side by side. Sweet Grass, which was the maiden's name,

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was the daughter of a chief. I had only been made a brave, with a name still to make, though having the reputation of seeing as far as most men, and knowing the value of keeping my own counsel. So, when I spoke of the matter to Silver Horn, he told me to begone with my fellows from the camp, and not come back again. There were five of us in a camp of many thousands, so what could we do but go? Before I went, Silver Horn told me that his daughter would be betrothed to Eagle's Claw, a young warrior who had already done great things in battle, and who might one day hold high place in the councils of his people.

"That night I took my life in my hands and went back right into the camp of the Blackfoot and saw Sweet Grass. It matters little how I managed it, but it was by the help of another woman who had been slighted by Eagle's Claw, and her scheme of revenge was of that subtlety peculiar to women who cherish that in their hearts for years which a man would put away from his thoughts in a day. I saw Sweet Grass, and I knew she would wait for me until such time as I sent or came for her. It was not possible to take her then.

"Next day, when with my comrades I was journey-

ing east again, and near a place now called Gleichen, we were skirting a bluff, and saw a not unusual sight even since those days, some little distance out on the prairie. A covered wagon, with eight horses drawing it, had been stopped on the prairie by a body of Blackfoot Indians. They had shot down those who had been riding alongside the wagon, and were now rushing it. But, standing some little distance out from the wagon, and on foot—for they had shot his horse—was a man clad in a long robe such as priests wear. He was bareheaded, and in his hands he bore a cross, which he held up as if to stop those who advanced towards the men who were slain. It was easy to see that he did not fear for himself, for he held aloft the cross, and cried to them in the Indian tongue, and in the name of the Manitou, to forbear from further indignity to those who had only come as friends.

“Those Blackfoot marauders were three to one of my party, but I gave the word, and we bore down on them.

“‘Hurt not the man with the Cross,’ I cried. ‘for good tidings did he bring to our people, and though a man who preaches peace, yet is he as valiant of heart as any warrior in the land. Look at him and judge for yourselves.’

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"There is one thing that stamps a man as a man, be he white or red, and that is courage.

"We rode right on to those Blackfoot, not circling as is the Indian way, but in order to confound them, and the sooner to come to close quarters with them.

"They fired on us as we came; but we were all young men, and our blood was hot, and most of us burned with anger against the Blackfoot, seeing how we had been sent away with shame from their camp on the previous day. There was no holding back my comrades, and we routed those Blackfoot so that only two escaped to tell of it.

"We buried those who were with the priest, he himself helping to dig their graves; and it was wonderful to see how, though doubtless stricken with grief for the loss of his friends, he yet spoke words of high courage, and even asked the Manitou to forgive those who had killed them, seeing they knew not what they had done. He was a man and a great warrior, that young priest of the soft words and the fearless face! And when we made to scalp the Blackfoot we had slain, he stood before us with the Cross and told us to stand back. He told us of his Master the Manitou, and how we were all—Cree and

Blackfoot al'ke—His children, and somehow there was not one of us who would disobey him. He began to dig their graves himself—just as if they had been his own brothers—and when we looked wonderingly upon him, we were filled with a spirit so different from anything we had ever known that we helped him to bury our enemies! Ough, ough! he called himself a man of Peace, but he was a great warrior!”

Little Dog stopped in his tale, and looked at the opposite hillside with an unwonted light in his old eyes. Peter Dick remained silent, and after a brief pause the Indian went on again.

“And tnen, when the graves of all who had been slain were covered over, the priest raised his Cross and called on his Manitou to judge between them all, red men and white men, friends and enemies alike, and to have mercy upon them. Ah, Peter, he was indeed a great chief, that young man with the Cross!

“But almost before the priest had done speaking to his Manitou, we saw in the far distance a great body of horsemen advancing. It was the Blackfoot and the kin of the men we had slain in fair fight, and we could see that we in our turn would be slain if we tarried.

“I told the priest to get on a horse and to

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come with us. I told him that though great the Manitou might be, yet would He not look favourably on those who were foolish and allowed themselves to be captured without making a fight for it. We made that priest get upon a horse, and then we rode for a lonely stockaded hut I had seen on a little rise, and surrounded by little hills, when I had first come that way. It had been a trader's post belonging to the Hudson Bay Company in the old days, and I knew that there we might take refuge and defend ourselves, for our horses were leg-weary and could go no farther.

"We made that post, round which there was a stockade such as you may see to this day at Qu'appelle, and there for several days and nights we kept the Blackfoot at bay. Again and again they tried to steal upon us, but we never slept save one or two of us in the daytime, and every time they came we shot them down from the loopholes in the stockade. And all this time the priest acquitted himself like a warrior, and even offered to give himself up to the Blackfoot after making a bargain with them that if he did so they would allow us to go.

"In order to test his words and courage—and I do not think I doubted him—I let him approach

them with a branch, which is a sign of truce, just as I am told a flag of white is amongst you white people—though, as I understand, sometimes misused. We heard him beg of them to take him and allow us to go, and we also heard him say that it was he who was the cause of all the trouble. But the Blackfoot would not hear of it, and though, doubtless, wondering at and admiring his courage, they told him to go back again to us, for they meant to have us all. For the Blackfoot have always admired courage, and, I will say it to their credit, they never forget it.

“We had been in the fort a week, and our horses, which, of course, we could not get inside the stockade, had all been shot or had strayed. It seemed that the Blackfoot were getting tired of the siege, for many of them seemed to have gone away, and those that were left withdrew to some considerable distance. Still, I knew better than suppose they had slackened in their determination to capture us. I also knew that the fire and the stake would be ours if they succeeded in taking us alive. Sometimes for a whole day we would not catch sight of a single enemy.

“It was at the close of the seventh day, and we had eaten the last of the horse-flesh that could be used, and which had been our food for two or

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three days, when I saw in a hollow seven horses feeding towards us. They were very poor, very lean horses, and hardly fit for half a day's ride. I knew at once that the cunning enemy had driven them towards us, thinking that we should seize them, and putting our bridles upon them, try to ride away, and then they would catch us. It would have been very easy to do that if we had been so foolish as ride those horses.

" 'Brothers,' I said when I saw those wretched horses, 'it is well with us. Now we have the means of making our escape!'

" But the others only laughed at me, and Grey Fox, the oldest of our party, said, 'Has our brother Little Dog lost his cunning through starvation? Does he think we are foolish enough to fall into a trap like that? No; when the end is near we must sally out and fall in fair fight.'

" Then I told them my plan, and to a man they rejoiced and wondered they had not thought of it, too. Only the priest would have nothing to do with our plan, but wished us well, and said that next day when we were gone he would sally out alone with his Cross and give himself up. He said that he who takes up the Cross must not fear death, and though we could only imperfectly understand what he meant, we let him

be, for there was that about him which we knew was big medicine and of a higher life than ours.

"That night, when it grew dark, the horses came to a little hollow close to the stockade, and sallying out unseen by the enemy, we caught, killed, and skinned them. Then we said good-bye to the good priest—who would not come with us, say what we might—and going outside, approached the skins of the dead horses. Two of us took one skin, one in front and one in rear, so that when we stood up in the long grass it seemed as if the whole was a horse and alive. Into the two other skins the others got; and then, still carrying our rifles, we wandered slowly by the side of a watercourse, thinking that perhaps the Blackfoot would not suspect the trick that was being played upon them. And it was a trick of which they had never once dreamed.

"Once only, when some little distance out, we came to the Blackfoot sentinels, we heard one Blackfoot say to another, 'Perish those old brutes, they have wandered away from the enemy, who will not be likely to make use of them to-night.' 'Let them go,' said another of the enemy; 'our horses are not far away; they will go with them, and we can get them in the morning.'

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"And so we passed right through the watching lines of the Blackfoot, who, in the half-darkness, thought we were only old horses cropping as they went.

"And then we struck some of the Blackfoot horses picketed in a meadow, with two Indians keeping watch over them. I had one by the throat before he knew what I was, and one of my comrades had another. I told them not to kill them—thinking of the priest—but left them gagged and bound lying on the ground. And then we took the best of the enemy's horses, and slipping on our bridles of shaganappi,¹ mounted, and drove as many of the herd away with us as we could conveniently muster. We rode hard all that night, and next day and next night again, changing our mounts with those we drove, until at last we struck Swift Current Creek and chief Piapot with a large number of our own people, and we knew that we were safe, and where the Blackfoot would never follow. And that, Brother Peter, is how we outwitted the Blackfoot."

Little Dog stopped, and folding his lean brown hands in front of him, gazed wistfully into space. The dead past, with all its stirring and tender memories, was very near to him now, and the

¹ Green-hide.

pathos of it all kept him wondering and silent.

"Thank you very much, Little Dog," said Peter when a minute or two had elapsed. "It is one of the very best stories I ever heard. It was very clever to outwit the Blackfoot as you did, and only that you yourself told me, I could hardly have believed it. And did you ever hear what became of the priest afterwards?"

Little Dog started as if he had been awakened out of some particularly vivid day-dream, and did not seem particularly sorry to be awakened.

"Yes," he replied; "we heard long afterwards. He went out next day and gave himself up to Crowfoot himself, who had come up early that morning. Now, Crowfoot, as you know, was one of the wisest and most just Red men who ever governed a people, and when he learned how the priest had helped to bury his dead braves who were slain in fair fight, and saw for himself how that they had not been scalped, he wondered greatly, and asked the priest why, in the first place, he had come amongst them, and why, in the second, he had not made good his escape from the fort when he might have done so with the others.

"And then the priest told him that he had not come amongst them to run away, but to tell them

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about the Manitou. But that is an old story, and every one in Canada knows how Crowfoot took to him, and how the wise counsels of the priest were followed by Crowfoot, and how the Blackfoot nation was twice prevented from rising in open rebellion against the Government when most of the Crees and the other Indians, under the false teaching of Louis Riel and his *metis*, had risen. That priest is an old man now, and Crowfoot is dead, but the Blackfoot people are still a nation, and the good work done by that fearless Roman Catholic priest stands out as a record of what may be done by one man who has a great cause at heart."

Peter Dick would have liked to ask Little Dog as to whether he ever saw Sweet Grass again ; but the little Indian did not tell him, and Peter Dick forbore to ask. As, however, with the coming of the Canadian Pacific Railway shortly afterwards civilisation progressed rapidly, and largely owing to the influence of Father Lacombe and the kind and firm mentorship of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, the old feuds between Blackfoot and Cree came to an end, it is more than likely that Little Dog found his way back to where he had left Sweet Grass, with what results he himself knows best. Had the affair ended happily,

perhaps Little Dog would have spoken of it; but, again, the memories we sometimes cherish most are those we care least to speak about.

Tapper and Big Head got up to continue the watch, and Peter and Little Dog lay down and rolled themselves in their blankets for a few hours' sleep.

They were early astir, determined to push on to the particular locality where, from hints dropped by the plotters, they believed John Thorne was kept imprisoned. But it was a much more difficult task than they had imagined. Instead of there being one main valley, there seemed to be several, and the ground was so broken and obstructed by huge columns of coloured clay that they could never see any distance ahead. What with having to pursue an irregular course, they were in constant danger of losing it altogether. Even the Indians had to keep their wits about them. Moreover, the extent of the Bad Lands was much greater than they had at first imagined. They could find no tracks, and although they frequently separated and went out on both flanks in the hope of cutting some, they were not rewarded with any success. It was terribly disappointing, and the thought that John Thorne was in all probability within a few miles of them, and

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urgently requiring their aid, added poignancy to the situation.

Noon, and they had made so little progress that they resolved to adopt a more methodical search. They would appoint a camp, and going out on either hand, circle towards the spot where the enemy had camped on the previous day. It was deemed advisable that Peter Dick should accompany Mr. Tapper, but that Jim should go out by himself. The latter had on two or three occasions shown that he possessed the faculty of locality to quite a considerable extent. By impressing certain prominent and peculiar landmarks on his memory before setting out, and every now and again turning round so as to keep them in view, it was unlikely he would go astray.

They started out in different directions, with an understanding that they must return before dusk. Jim, having been allowed to take part in such an important mission, felt not a little proud. He followed up a grassless gully, "boning a line" as old bushmen term it, and which simply resolves itself into keeping three objects focussing each other, so as not to deviate from a straight course. He was doubtless more intent on doing this than seeing that the course was clear around him, for he had not been out for more than an hour when

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he was brought to a sense of his carelessness in a most disconcerting fashion. He was passing between two tall rocks, when suddenly a couple of men stepped from behind them. One grasped his rifle, and the other caught him by the left arm. He had no time to make the slightest resistance, and in another moment he was a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXII

A TERRIBLE FATE


"So, you young dog, you thought I wouldn't get ahead of you, did you?"

Even if Jim had not seen the grinning face of Redfish, he would have recognised him by his high-pitched nasal voice. There were several men around him now, and Jim was very badly scared indeed. There was not the very faintest hope of escape for him, but, all the same, he lost his head for the moment and made a sudden struggle to get free. But the man who already had him by the coat collar only tightened his grip, and shook him as a terrier might a rat.

"That's right, Mons," said Redfish. "He's the cheekiest young cub I ever came across. Just give him breath enough and he'll cheek you for all he is worth."

"Let him try it, and see what he gets," observed Mons; and straightway, somewhat releasing his hold of Jim, he gave him an opportunity.

"Brutes — cowardly brutes!" hiccupped Jim with extreme difficulty, but comprehensively.



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Mons tightened his hold again, with a muttered something that he himself would have had some difficulty in interpreting. He had been too much taken by surprise to pick out a fitting word from his extensive vocabulary.

"Cub!" exclaimed Redfish; and tucking his under-lip under his upper teeth, he made a vicious dive at Jim and began to pound him on the back and pull his hair. He gave the boy a very rough and unpleasant time indeed.

"Nothing you do can make you a bigger coward than what I thought you were first time I saw you!" gasped Jim. And kicking out, he managed to give Redfish a violent blow on the shins.

Only because the pain was so intense as to incapacitate him, Redfish would have kicked and buffeted Jim to death on the spot. As it was, the pain seemed to stimulate his imagination, for while he was yet bent nearly double he cried:

"I've got it, boys. It's no use asking the young rotter where his pals are. He'd only lie to us, and perhaps lead us into a trap. We mustn't give him a chance of playing up as did that wretched cur of a Redskin whose body is now at the bottom of the river. I've got a safe cure for this cub's cheek. Let's tie him up and build him into a cave in the side of the cliff."

"That's the style," exclaimed Mons; "then no one in particular will have done the trick—you savvy?"

"What! you'd bury me alive!" exclaimed Jim, aghast with horror. "You'd be liker devils than men to do a thing like that!"

"We be devils accordin' to you as it is," laughed the gloomy kidnapper in his joyless and ponderous way. "But you don't seem to understan', we don't mean to kill you all at once."

"No, no," broke in Redfish, who seemed to have recovered himself somewhat, and addressing Jim. "It would spoil the fun to kill you outright. We'll only build you into a little corner in the cliff and let you stay there. We'll take you to some place out of the way, where you can shout yourself hoarse and no one'll hear you. I'm going to give you something on account for this thing that your friend the Indian gave me. By the time you're dead I guess accounts will be getting square."

Sick with horror as Jim was, he yet was able to realise what Redfish meant by "the thing" for which he owed the Indian. The leader had an ugly cut on the right temple, while the cheek-bone and forehead were considerably discoloured. Little Dog had hurled the rifle to some effect on the previous day.

"Two of you tie the young cub's hands, and hitch on a belt to his so that he can't get away," cried Redfish. "He's a lively young cub and no mistake."

This was quickly done, and Redfish continued:

"Now, let's get up this side gully, and the farther up the better. His friends have hardly time to more than take a peep up these side-shows, and they'd never dream of following up to the top. Go ahead."

Giving Jim a dig in the back, Redfish led the little procession up the side *coulée* or gully.

"Keep on the hard rock," cried the leader; "we don't want those other chaps to be picking up our tracks, and perhaps finding him before the life is out of him."

"He'll be dead all in good time," observed the melancholy member of the gang before mentioned, as if he rather enjoyed the reflection. "I knowed a cove oncet as we diddled the undertakers out of, and he lived five days afore 'e croaked."

"How did you know he lived so long, Mons?" asked Redfish with that wry contortion on his face which passed for a smile.

"Sorry I can't enter into details," replied Mons, evidently well pleased with himself. "Just suppose that I guessed he lived for five days, and

that's as much as is good for you. It's hard to say how long this brat'll live, for there'll be no one here to see."

Redfish broke into a nasal cackle, and the little procession headed up the side ravine, which was so low and narrow where it entered the valley that it gave the impression it went no farther. But this Jim found to be a very erroneous conclusion indeed. As it penetrated into the plateau the sides grew steeper, the lower part being perpendicular and honeycombed, and the upper of loose furze-grown debris impossible of ascent or descent. Jim knew there must be thousands of such gullies leading to nowhere in that wild country, and it would be quite impossible to search a tenth of them. Moreover, this was one that, owing to its deceptive entrance, his friends would in all probability skip. He knew that the men whose prisoner he now was had every reason to desire his death, and he could also understand how every man of them burned with a personal sense of wrong and revenge. After their experience of the day before with Little Dog, they would take very good care to make no mistakes on the present occasion. It was appalling to Jim to think that human beings should behave like fiends.

At last they came to a place where the gully became extremely narrow, and the end of it was in sight. When the snows melted in the spring, or when it rained heavily, this now dry water-course would be converted into a raging torrent. On either hand there were numerous little caves or crevasses, caused partly by volcanic action and by many floods. Before one of these Redfish stopped.

"Here we are, boys," he cried. "We've found the identical article we've been looking for—four feet in width, I should say, by three feet in height, and going back into the solid hillside about fifteen or twenty feet. Don't let's waste time over him, but shove him in."

He turned to Jim.

"Now look here, youngster," he continued. "Are you or are you not going to tell us where your mates are?"

"At the present moment I really can't tell you where they are," replied Jim truthfully enough.

"Will you lead us to your camp?"

"No!" fairly yelled Jim, and there was a world of determination in that one word.

"Then, boys, you'll all bear witness that this lad distinctly refuses to be saved. We're not

going to hurt a hair of his head—not a single hair—but we're all of one mind in that we've got to show him somehow that we disapprove of his proceedings. Shove him into that cave, you fellows, and all of you get your shoulders to some of those big slabs of rock and build him in. We're only going to make a prisoner of him, you understand, and after a bit we'll come and see how he's getting on."

But Jim knew only too well what the cold-blooded villain meant. He made a frantic effort to free himself, but his captors were prepared for him.

They tied his hands and his feet, and thrust him into the low, narrow cave. With his back to the rock, and in a sitting position, he watched the kidnappers carry huge slabs of rock and build them across the mouth of his prison. The blocks of stone were such that he knew his unaided strength could never hope to move. For a minute or two he lost his head and struggled desperately. He begged and prayed of them to let him go.

But they thrust him back into the cave with a dogged silence that was more terrible than words.

When the barricade rose to the level of the roof he was in semi-darkness. He heard them

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roll more stones against those already built in, and then the operations ceased.

"Good-bye, youngster!" Redfish called to him. "We're going now. Hope you'll be comfortable till we come again."

The voice of the murderer sounded as if it came from another world.

CHAPTER XXIII

BIG HEAD HAS AN ADVENTURE

MR. TAPPER, Peter Dick and the two Indians had returned to the appointed rendezvous, and of course they were greatly concerned about Jim's absence. When it grew dark their anxiety increased, and they went out in the direction he had taken in the hope that they might meet him returning. They would have lit a fire in order to guide him, lest by chance he should have missed his way, but they realised this might only be the means of bringing disaster on the entire party, as they would then be an easy mark for the enemy's bullets. To fire their guns would only guide Redfish and his gang to their whereabouts, and lead to their being surprised. They, however, hallooed and kept shifting their ground, in the hope that Jim might hear and answer them. It was daylight when they returned to the camp, tired and dispirited, to tell of their fruitless search and wanderings.

"I very much fear something has happened to

Jim," observed Mr. Tapper, betraying unmistakable worry. "He may have met with an accident—sprained an ankle or something—and be slowly making his way back to camp; but I'm inclined to think those confounded scoundrels have been too many for us and have captured him."

"But they surely wouldn't risk doing anything very bad to him," observed Peter Dick. "This is the twentieth century, and the Royal North-West Mounted Police are in the country."

"I don't wish to be an alarmist," said Mr. Tapper, "and I've got faith in Jim's discretion, but you've had an exhibition of what they've done already. Besides, Redfish has a fortune within his grasp, and although he is a coward, not even the fear of the rope will deter him from resorting to extreme measures. We must resume our search. What does Little Dog think?"

"I think that the sooner we have something to eat and drink the sooner we will be able to find Jim. I am also inclined to believe that the rough-haired coyote, being of a suspicious and cowardly nature, would not kill our brother Jim outright; but he would dispose of him so that he might speedily die, and at the same time not give the others any hold upon him."

"When I saw my grandmother in my dreams

the other night, I knew there would be trouble," broke in Big Head. "There always is trouble when my grandmother shows herself."

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Tapper, obviously not in the mind to be amused. "What has your grandmother to do with Jim, I'd like to know!"

"She told me to listen to the voice and I would learn something," replied Big Head, with the imperturbability of a great nature, and yet in a tone that implied dignified rebuke. "The white men I have seen in this country have no grandmothers—at least I have never seen any. It may be that they have left them behind on the other side of the great sea-water. If so, their ghosts will one day arrive and make things unpleasant for them."

"Goodness, what a prospect!" exclaimed Mr. Tapper resignedly, and regarding the Indian with a fresh curiosity. "Now, what would you do, Big Head, supposing you were out by yourself and heard the voice of your venerable female relative?"

Big Head became demonstrative for an Indian.

"Do!" he exclaimed proudly, elevating his aquiline nose to the correct angle. "As old Nokomis once said to the young braves of my tribe—'When danger confronts you, keep an eye on Big Head, and follow him if you would be clear of it.'"

Despite the serious nature of the situation, this was too much for Mr. Tapper. He threw back his head, and sent such a thunderous peal of laughter into the still night that the others started to their feet in alarm. But in another minute the big man was himself again.

"The only thing we can do," he said, "is to keep a fire going in the valley. And we must take good care to keep at a safe distance from it. It would be folly to go out of sight of it on a dark night like this. Besides, we've got to do a power of work to-morrow, and can't be fit for it unless we reserve ourselves."

It was a wretched, long, cheerless night, and so dark that to move about was almost an impossibility. Indeed, Mr. Tapper insisted upon the others going to sleep while he kept watch. He promised to wake them just before dawn. This he did, and when Peter Dick unrolled himself from his blanket on his improvised bed of soft sage-brush, he found a pannikin of fragrant coffee awaiting him, with juicy, grilled antelope steaks and freshly made Johnnie-cakes ; for that was how Mr. Tapper had worked off his impatience in the very early hours of the morning.

They did not waste much time over breakfast, so as soon as it was finished, and before the sun

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was up, they laid their plans so as to thoroughly explore the likeliest part of the valley. Mr. Tapper insisted on Peter Dick travelling with him. In the event of not falling in with Jim, they were to return to the camp about midday, so as to shift it and search in another direction. The two Indians went out separately.

About noon Big Head was cutting across a plateau or bench, keeping a sharp look-out for tracks or anything else that might present itself, when he dropped on what was evidently the head of a gully that ran into the main valley hard by. A dry watercourse dipped suddenly into it, and Big Head noted that if he could only descend to the bottom the travelling would be on hard rock and nice and easy for him. Moreover, he noticed that the sides of the ravine presented many curious holes or caves, and he himself was of an inquisitive turn of mind. Perhaps other Indians in the good old days of murder and pillage had hidden valuable treasure in this lonely spot, and had gone out and got killed, so that the loot might still be here. The idea of buried treasure appealed to Big Head. He liked to get things without working or fighting for them.

It was a stiff and even dangerous climb down into the ravine, and by the time Big Head got

to the bottom he wondered why on earth he had run such risks to get into such a place. He did not like the look of it at all. It was very dark and gloomy, the sort of spot that he imagined would be popular with discontented ghosts. If he had thought he could manage to climb out again, he would certainly have done so without farther waste of time; but he realised the impossibility of such a feat, burdened as he was with his rifle. He looked anxiously around. It was just the place where he might expect to hear that voice his grandmother had told him about in his dreams. He wished he could see the sun, or that there were a few birds or animals about to make the place a little more cheerful. To put it very mildly, it was funereal, and there was a deathly stillness that made even the sound of his own footsteps uncanny. There was certainly a lot of curious holes in the side of the rock, but he would defer prying into them until a more convenient season. In one place there was an odd pile of stones placed against the cliff, and he knew this had been done comparatively recently, for the weather-beaten or mossy sides of the stones were frequently turned the wrong way. He hurried past this spot inspired by a creepy sensation, not altogether unfamiliar to him, but over which he had no control.

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He realised he must not let this feeling get the upper hand of him, so he determined to fight against it.

"Bah!" he cried aloud. "What foolishness it is to dread what one cannot see! If my grandmother would only——"

He came to a sudden halt, and felt his hair bristling on his head. He could have sworn he heard a voice calling, but muffled and indistinct. It might have come from the rock alongside him, or the ground under his feet, it sounded so queerly. It was terribly mystifying and unpleasant, to say the least of it. But it was surely all nonsense, and he knew how easy it was to work on one's own fears.

"Hell-o-o! Hell-o-o-o!"

It was like the wail of a lost soul.

He glanced around fearfully and distractedly, but there was nothing in sight. It was surely the voice his grandmother had told him about. He might have faced it on the open prairie, but in such a ghostly place it did not give him half a chance.

Again the voice rang out as if at his elbow. With a hoarse ejaculation he cast restraint to the winds, and fled headlong down the ravine, covering yards at every stride. His grandmother's spirit expected too much of him.

CHAPTER XXIV

BIG HEAD IS PERSUADED TO RE-SEEK THE SPIRIT

MR. TAPPER, Peter Dick, and Little Dog had returned shortly after noon, as agreed upon, and were getting ready a hasty meal preparatory to moving farther up the valley, when they were startled by hearing the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps. Next moment Big Head, with his eyes starting from his head and in a condition of wild excitement, dashed headlong into the camp. Mr. Tapper regarded him with mild surprise, and Little Dog nodded his head significantly.

"Well, Big Head," said Mr. Tapper dropping the tea into the kettle that had just begun to boil up. "You're not usually in such a hurry. What is the matter this time?"

Big Head, who had no breath to spare just at that moment, flung himself panting on the ground.

Little Dog regarded him critically, and remarked:

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"Ough! ough! Our brother has either seen his grandmother or has heard the voice."

"Oh, rubbish!" cried Mr. Tapper. "This is no time for nonsense. Something must have happened to him. We must get to the bottom of this."

Without further ado Mr. Tapper put down the kettle and approached Big Head.

"Come," he said, shaking him with no light hand by the shoulder; "you've got your wind again, Big Head. What has brought you here in such a pickle? Out with it, man! we've no time to waste."

"The voice!" gasped Big Head. "I have heard the voice! It called on me by name. It was at the head of a dark *coulée* behind some stones, and I fled lest by chance the spirit would catch me. It is a way they have to trap the unwary."

"Then, by Jove, we'll trap them!" cried Mr. Tapper, picking up his rifle and tightening his belt. "What you've told us sounds encouraging. Get ready, Peter and Little Dog."

Mr. Tapper hastily crammed some articles of an edible nature into his pockets, and giving Peter Dick a quart pot to carry, again turned to Big Head.

"Come, get up and take us straight to that gully where you heard the voice," he said. "I've an idea we'll learn something there."

But Big Head declared that all the scalps ever collected by his tribe would not tempt him to go near that gully again.

"We'll soon see about that," observed Mr. Tapper; and in another moment he had caught Big Head by the shoulders and lifted him on to his feet. He then placed the muzzle of his rifle in close proximity to the small of the Indian's back.

"Now, don't be an ass, Big Head," he continued. "I don't care about using force with a friend, but, by George, I'm not going to stand on ceremony with even your grandmother when the life of a comrade is at stake! Just trek back the way you came, and we'll follow and take jolly good care nothing happens to you. Now, hurry up like a good fellow."

Big Head would have been quite willing to forgo the credit of being considered a good fellow if he could only have been excused from hurrying up. But the big man with the mighty voice was one of those stupidly perverse whites who could only be brought to understand that which was directly under his nose, and so the matter admitted of no delay.

"My brother Timo Tapper forgets himself," observed Big Head in a dignified fashion. "Moreover, he seems to overlook the fact that the gun he holds so awkwardly in his hands is loaded."

Mr. Tapper assured him there was not the slightest danger of him overlooking the fact. Neither would there be much chance of him missing if Big Head wasted more time in speech.

The Indian took the hint and trotted off. Still, he did not go so fast but that Mr. Tapper's gun was always in close proximity to the small of his back. Big Head felt that even that intangible "voice" was less to be feared than the intrusive muzzle of a deadly weapon in the hands of an impulsive white man. Little Dog and Peter Dick followed close on either hand, keeping a sharp look-out against surprise. Big Head led them for a couple of miles at least across a stony plateau, and then he paused on the brink of a ravine so steep and so deep that when he looked down into it he seemed bewildered, and fell back upon that time-honoured resource of kings and beggars alike—the active employment of his finger-tips amongst his snaky locks.

"Hurry up, Big Head; you really did cross this ditch," observed Mr. Tapper. "See, there's

your tracks. You must have felt the necessity of exerting yourself when you tackled it. But where you came up you must go down, so go ahead."

That ravine was indeed an eloquent tribute to Big Head's prowess in surmounting difficulties when put to it. The odd thing was that the beautifully direct but extremely rough route he must have taken when fleeing from the voice now surprised no one so much as himself. He had indeed unwittingly accomplished a most difficult and dangerous mountaineering feat.

They dropped over the brink of the ravine, and it is quite probable that had they not been labouring under the keenest excitement they would not have attempted it. They slid and let themselves down the rough face of a precipice that was nearly as steep as the wall of a house. Owing to the fact that they carried fire-arms, they prudently kept a safe distance apart. They were all good climbers, otherwise they would never have negotiated the chasm. To climb up again on the other side, encumbered as they were with their rifles, was a feat they in all probability would not have attempted had it been submitted to them in cold blood beforehand. As it was, they success-

fully accomplished it, although their hands and clothes suffered very considerably in consequence.

Then across a further strip of rising ground until they came to the brink of the gully in which Big Head had heard the voice. Here the gallant Indian betrayed a disposition to lag, but the muzzle of Mr. Tapper's rifle in a practical fashion evinced a decided objection to such tactics. Big Head decided to face the spirits.

Down the rough sides of the gully they clambered until they stood in its damp, gloomy depths. Big Head's eyes wandered fearfully around.

"The grandmother of my brother Big Head cannot be cheerfully inclined," commented Little Dog disapprovingly. "I do not wonder that he was averse to tarrying here."

"Lead on, Macduff!" cried Mr. Tapper, his great voice filling the narrow ravine with a hollow, trumpet-like sound. "It is no time to admire the scenery. Lead on!"

Although Big Head was evidently suffering from lack of enthusiasm, the others were not. Mr. Tapper was again obliged to resort to the gun-barrel. Big Head made a virtue of necessity, and started up the gully at an increased pace.

In two minutes more they came to a place where one side of the ravine was simply honey-

combed cliff. In front of a low opening or cave there was a partially demolished wall of loose stones. The latter lay scattered about, and bore evidence of having been mostly handled from the outside. On the other side of the opening, and inside the mouth of the cave, there were comparatively few stones, and these seemed almost beyond the power of any one to move.

Mr. Tapper and Peter Dick ran forward and peered into the gloom of the recess.

"Jim!" they cried in chorus.

But there was no Jim there.

Something like a groan escaped Mr. Tapper's lips. He caught sight of a knotted handkerchief that lay partly concealed by a flat stone. It was one that had belonged to Jim.

"Jim has been imprisoned here," he cried, betraying considerable agitation. "He can't be long gone, and some one must have come back for him and helped him to get out. I suspect it means foul play. Come along there, hurry up or we may be too late!"

"Hush!" cried Big Head, who with Little Dog had been looking around for tracks, and who now, approaching them, held up one hand warningly before Mr. Tapper's face. "Jim is with one of the cut-throats up the gully. Be quick, but take care. I can hear them speaking. Be quick—be quick!"

CHAPTER XXV

A DESPERATE VILLAIN

BIG HEAD, realising that his supposed spirit had in all probability been nothing more dangerous than the imprisoned Jim, now burned with a desire to retrieve his besmirched reputation. Catching sight of footprints, and quickly following them up, he had seen, through the cotton-wood trees and saskatoon bushes, one of the enemy with the boy they sought. In two minutes more he had acquainted his friends with the fact.

"We must capture that scoundrel before he has time to do any mischief," said Tapper when a peep through the trees convinced him of the correctness of Big Head's news. "Peter you'd better stop here so as to see that no one comes up the ravine and surprises us. Big Head and Little Dog, we must sneak on that fellow and collar him before he knows where we are. There must be no bungling this business."

"If Timo Tapper will allow me," said Big Head, "I will take him prisoner before he can lift a hand."

To Mr. Tapper's surprise, Little Dog acquiesced in this. Probably the little Indian felt that the good name of his race had been made to look rather small through his comrade's late derelictions, so it would be as well to let the white people see what even a braggart Indian could do when he chose. As for himself, his reputation needed no fresh exploitation.

"Go on, then, Big Head," said Mr. Tapper. "Let us see how cleverly you can take that man prisoner."

In the meantime Jim was having a strange time of it. It was perhaps a fortuitous circumstance that had brought one of Redfish's gang on the scene immediately Big Head had fled panic-stricken. At this point, however, in order to make things clear, it may be as well to tell something about the intruder in question, and why it was he had appeared upon the scene.

It was the huge, brigand-like Poddy who had been looking after the kidnapped rancher, John Thorne, who was now with Jim. After Redfish had revisited Pasqua, where he had run foul of Mr. Tapper and the boys, and after the fight in which his reinforcements had suffered very severely, he returned to the kidnappers who were in charge of the rancher, hoping that they

had effectually disposed of him. Great was his annoyance when he found John Thorne was still in the land of the living. In order that his evil designs might be achieved, he told off Mons, who was really an evil ruffian, and Poddy, under the impression that these two gentlemen would soon get rid of his inconvenient prisoner. But here Redfish made a great mistake; Poddy and Mons mutually hated each other. The latter had frequently tried to make a butt of the apparently dull giant before the others, and Poddy had resented it. Their dislike had culminated when one day Mons, in a reckless mood, kicked over the giant's draughtboard, when the latter promptly punished him in a way he was never likely to forget. It was unlikely, therefore, that either was going to commit any act which would give the other any hold over him. It was, strangely enough, a misconception of Poddy's real character that had prompted Redfish to induce him to go back to where Jim was imprisoned and, to use his significant words, "make sure of him." Poddy, flattered by finding a villain of Redfish's stamp estimate him so highly, promptly consented. He did not trouble about how he was going to carry out the murderous designs entrusted to him.

When Poddy, after a long and weary trudge, arrived at Jim's prison-house, he found that, not having thought anything more about the matter, he had not therefore made up his mind as to how he was to set about murdering him. As he, however, loved to inspire dread in others—work for which Nature had amply endowed him—he determined to have a little entertainment on his own account. He therefore came close up to the rough wall of stones, and sang out, "Hello thar!"

Jim, who had by this time nearly shouted himself hoarse, remembered the voice, and feebly responded. Still, his heart sank within him when he discovered that it was only one of Redfish's gang, and not one of the Indians.

"How're ye gittin' on?" inquired Poddy, putting his mouth to a small opening, and in default of not being ready with something more to the point.

"Give me a drink of water, for goodness' sake!" implored Jim. "And I'm dreadfully hungry, too. You're the man they call Poddy, aren't you?"

"Pore bloke!" muttered Poddy, to whom the appeal for something to drink had peculiar associations. "Coppers hot, eh?"

"Yes," replied Jim, to whom the latter part of Poddy's question was Sanscrit. "I feel like

going mad, and I'm so hungry! Do let me out, please."

"Pooh! hungry!" snorted Poddy contemptuously—"that's nothing! I thought you said you wanted a drink."

"I do, very badly. I haven't had a drop of anything since they put me in here; and, oh, I don't know if you've ever known what it is to have a throat like mine!" And Jim stopped short through sheer physical inability to say more.

Poddy chuckled, though in justice to him, be it said, it was not over the other's desperate condition.

"Know!" he exclaimed, with a world of pathos and reminiscence in his voice. "Ra-a-ther! Many's a time!"

"You're Mr. Poddy, aren't you?" asked Jim.

"Perhaps I are, and perhaps I aren't," replied the gentleman in question artfully. "But do you really think you're so bad that you'll soon croak if you don't get a drink?"

"I'm half dead now!" replied Jim with conviction.

"Then p'rhaps the best thing you can do is to be whole dead," observed Poddy reflectively. "It'll save me a lot o' bother."

"But I'll go mad if I don't get a drink.

You surely wouldn't want to see a fellow go mad!" pleaded poor Jim earnestly.

"Don't know," observed Poddy after a pause; "but I don't 'xactly like the idear of yer going bahmy! It's coming it pretty low down that is. What do you think?"

"I think so, too, Mr. Poddy. It is exactly my opinion. I'm sure you wouldn't grudge me a little drink of water. I've been listening to it splash, splashing on the stones all the time I've been here, until I almost wished I was dead."

"And all for a drink of water!" exclaimed Mr. Poddy contemptuously. "Waal, some people has queer tastes. Now, I s'pose you wouldn't care for a smoke, would you? I've got some prime black twist here, so strong it 'ud lift the top of your head off."

"Well, I'm not much on the smoke," replied Jim incautiously; "but I'll risk it, Mr. Poddy, if it's to please you, and if you give me a drink first, just to start me off properly, you know." Jim was now fully convinced that Mr. Poddy wanted humouring.

"Pouf!" grunted Mr. Poddy. "You're not much of a chap, you are. Before I was your age I'd smoked right through a cane chair b'longing to my old dad, and—lor', I was sick the first time

or two, you bet! But I stuck to it—I was allus a dickens of a feller to stick to a thing, you can lay to that. And now—just look at me now!" And Mr. Poddy gave his mighty chest a mighty thump.

"But I can't see you, Mr. Poddy, that's the trouble," said Jim. "You see, I can't move the big stones on this side. It's so easy to do it from yours."

But Mr. Poddy was not quite so easy to persuade, and after he had digested the proposition for a good three minutes he broke out into a loud fit of laughter.

"Waal, you're a simple sort of cove to think that Bill Poddy is so green as all that," he observed when he was able to. "No, no, my man. I'm fly, I am, and deep as the deep blue sea, you bet. You ain't gittin' any change out of old Bill Poddy. I guess I'll jest pot you where you are."

It was a pity Mr. Poddy's humour was of such a misleading nature. He could not have "potted" a fly in cold blood.

"Pot away, then!" cried Jim fiercely, losing his temper in his weak and sorely tried condition. "A man who would come to mock a boy dying of thirst and hunger is the worst sort of murderer,

anyhow. I suppose you came here on purpose to kill me."

"Borack!" snorted Poddy surprisedly. Jim's attitude was something so foreign to his own nature and experience that he could not all at once make up his mind as to how he should meet it. "I ain't goin' to kill you on purpose to please you, you bet," he added somewhat confusedly.

Jim was in despair; this thick-skulled conspirator would neither do one thing or the other. It was evidently no use appealing to the better instincts of the brute—if indeed he possessed any better instincts. It was no good making his desperate position worse than it was. He lay back in order to try and resign himself to his fate. A couple of minutes elapsed, and Poddy hailed him again.

"I say, thar," he cried, "kin you play draughts?"

"I can beat you, anyhow," was Jim's ready response, prompted by a ray of hope.

"You think you kin!" exclaimed Poddy. "You really think you kin!—a whipper-snapper like you! Waal then, we'll see."

And in another moment he was throwing to right and left the heavy boulders that had taken two or three men to move.

CHAPTER XXVI

A GAME AT DRAUGHTS

WHEN Jim emerged from his rocky prison on the demolition of the barrier, his limbs were so cramped that he could hardly stand. Mr. Poddy, doubtless affected by the sight, steadied him with his left hand, while he took good care to hold his rifle conveniently in his right.

"Stidy thar!" observed the desperado. "You puts me in mind of fust time I smoked that cane chair. Cricky, I was bad! But as I've told you, I stuck to it, I did, and smoked the whole consarn, legs and arms and back and bottom as well, inside six weeks! That was persewerance for you! You're quite sure it ain't a smoke you'd like?"

"I don't suppose you mind me taking a drink," observed Jim, as he rather shakily made for a pool of water.

"All right," answered Poddy, helping to steady him; "but if you thinks I'm going to let you bust yer bloomin' self before you plays that game

of draughts, then you don't know old Bill Poddy. Stidy thar!"

Jim had thrown himself down full length beside the pool, and had actually buried his face in the water. But Mr. Poddy had no intention of being cheated out of his favourite recreation, so after Jim had swallowed as much as his custodian deemed good for him, he forcibly pulled him away from it by the heels.

"Quit, I say," commanded Mr. Poddy. "If you beats me at draughts you don't get any more water, but if I beats you I gives you another drink. That's all fair and square, ain't it?"

Jim considered it rather an unusual way of arranging matters, but he readily acquiesced, and determined that no matter how badly this stagey-looking ruffian played, he would play still worse. Jim subsequently found this was one of the most difficult tasks he had ever undertaken.

Mr. Poddy led Jim to a grassy spot, and commanded him to sit down opposite him. Perhaps what struck the boy just then was not so much the absurd nature of the situation as the beauty of even that otherwise gloomy gorge, and the blue strip of sky overhead. A few hours before he had given up hope of ever seeing them again, and now here he was with those awful pangs of thirst

somewhat assuaged, and about to play a game of draughts with a desperado! It was an incongruous and absurd situation, and what made it more so was the thought that although he was actually famishing, it was more than likely the enemy had food in his pockets. He determined to try and get some.

"You haven't such a thing as a little piece of bread or anything at all about you that one could eat, Mr. Poddy, have you?" asked Jim. "You see, it's getting on for two days now since I had a bite, and if I've got to play you at draughts I'll want to have all my wits about me."

"Guess you'd want 'em in any case," grunted Mr. Poddy. "But, goodness, you've jest bin and filled up your boiler with water—some people want a lot, and no mistake!"

Notwithstanding this, Mr. Poddy set about overhauling his sack-like pockets in order to ascertain the extent of his food supply. Jim observed with no little interest that each receptacle was secured by a horse-nail in the absence of buttons. Having withdrawn one of these ingenious safety-pins, he dived into a receptacle and withdrew a small folding cardboard draughtboard and a number of men about the size of a shilling. These he handled with evident pride and solicitude. From another

pocket he produced a dingy, leathery-looking object about the size of a saucer, and taking it up in the brown palm of one hand, he gave it a hearty smack with the other, and exclaimed:

"Listen to that, now!—and my own baking, too! Sounds holler like a drum, yet calc'lated to stick to one's ribs like stickin'-plaster!"

It had evidently been burned and partially scraped with a knife, but it was bread of a sort, and even the thought of the place it had come from did not daunt Jim. He stretched out a hand to take it.

"Stidy thar—stidy!" cried Mr. Poddy, withdrawing it. "You ain't to be trusted with sich-like delicacies just at present. See, here's one half—and go gently with it—and if you loses the first game you gets the other half. That's fair, ain't it?"

"Very fair indeed," replied Jim; and he spoke no more for two minutes, which was the exact time he took to devour Mr. Poddy's half Johnnie-cake. Already that glommy gorge was wearing a holiday appearance, and had it not been for the thought of the anxiety which his friends were sure to be experiencing, he would almost have enjoyed the unique situation. Mr. Poddy, if a somewhat doubtful and unreliable character, was otherwise

delightful, provided one did not dwell upon his personal appearance too critically. Jim began to think—as was indeed the case—that this fierce-looking fellow's outward appearance and manner were not altogether an index to his real character.

Jim would like to have obtained the other half of the cake on credit, but Mr. Poddy, being anxious to begin, had put the draughtboard between them, and placing the men, abruptly opened proceedings by making the first move. Unfortunately, a breeze began to stray down the gorge, which necessitated the enemy sitting with his back to it so as to prevent the draughtboard being blown away.

Jim began to fear he was not going to win the other half of the cake after all, for, play as badly as he could, Mr. Poddy played so very much worse that he speedily found himself in the undesirable position of being in the lead. He therefore realised that if he was to appease his hunger he must tax his brains so as to play the very worst game possible. His speculations as to what Mr. Poddy intended to do with him somewhat militated against him. He began to grow anxious, and at last his curiosity got the better of him.

“And supposing I win, Mr. Poddy,” he remarked somewhat anxiously, “don't you think there should

be a sort of consolation prize, seeing you get the other half of the cake? Anyhow, you'll let me get away before it gets dark, won't you? And, of course, I'll say nothing about having met you."

"No jolly fear!" snorted his opponent, whose geniality seemed to be oozing away now that he was in danger of losing the game. "S'posin' you win, back you goes, like a shot inter that dunjin-cell again. Not likely I'se goin' to let you crow over me!"

What could one do with a man of such unique mental calibre! It was maddening, to say the least of it, and what made matters ten times worse was that Jim could not lose that game though he tried ever so hard. He reversed the usual methods pursued in the game, and taxed his brains to the utmost to have his invincible white men trapped and captured. But it was no use; he kept finding himself in positions where it was absolutely necessary to capture the enemy. The worst of it all was that Mr. Poddy was beginning to lose his temper. In vain Jim tried to put him in a good humour by resurrecting such time-worn jokes as he had at his command, but Mr. Poddy mistook his intentions, and imagined that his adversary was covertly poking fun at or crowing over him

because of his success. Jim was at his wits' end and wholly desperate.

As the game drew towards a disastrous close, Mr. Poddy began to grow satirical.

"Think you can play!" he snorted. "Guess you couldn't play for sour apples if I happened to be in form. Don't know what's the matter with me this afternoon, unless it is because one of them fools in the camp upset me into the creek yesterday and seemed to think it was a fine joke. But, my eye! I had back at him, for I crammed a lot of pertater peelings and tea-leaves down his throat last night, and then made him swallow an old dish-cloth. No, I reckon he didn't get much change out of old Bill Poddy! It was that cove Mons, and, between you and me, I'd advise you to keep your weather eye upon him should you ever happen to be out wid him alone."

Jim looked at his huge bulk, and marvelled at the folly of any one who would dare to suggest a gratuitous bath, far less give him one. At the same time, there was an unexpected suggestion of hope in the big man's caution regarding Mons.

Just then, to Jim's horror, the game threatened to come to an abrupt termination in his favour; but Mr. Poddy, as if he could stand it no longer, gave the board an irate smack with his open hand

that sent it spinning, men and all, into the grass. Jim already pictured himself being forced once more into the cave. Next moment, however, a most unexpected thing happened. The rising breeze caught the shabby old hat through which part of the enemy's hair protruded, and blew it into a neighbouring bush. Mr. Poddy made a dash after it. Nimbly Jim sprang to his feet and picked up the rifle. Next moment it was pointed at the owner's head.

"Now, Mr. Poddy," he said quietly, "you're my prisoner, and before we proceed to business I'll thank you for the other half of that Johnnie-cake!"

CHAPTER XXVII

TURNING THE TABLES

WHEN Mr. Poddy turned round and saw Jim standing with his own rifle pointing straight at his head, the situation was so full of bitterness as to be paralysing. His eyes became saucer-like, his under-jaw dropped, his mouth opened, and he gazed blankly at his youthful adversary who had so smartly turned the tables on him. After an awkward pause, he stammered :

"Look out, matey ; thet gun's loaded !"

"I hope so," was the calm reply. "I wouldn't have much of a show with you if it wasn't."

"Did you say it was t'other half of that Johnnie-cake you wanted ?" inquired Mr. Poddy weakly.

"Yes," replied Jim ; "and as I'm desperately hungry I can eat it while I keep an eye on you. If you make a move, I warn you, I'll blow the top of your head off before you can say Jack Robinson."

"My eye !" exclaimed Mr. Poddy blankly. Then, as an inspiration seemed to come to him :

"I say, matey, I believe I've got another Johnnie-cake somewheres about me if you'd care to——"

"Keep your hands out of your pockets," commanded Jim sharply. "I want no hanky-panky tricks. You might have a pistol concealed about you for all I know."

"Waal!" ejaculated Mr. Poddy, who felt rather flattered than otherwise in being suspected of such a ruse. "You hev' got the dead drop on me, I'll admit. Did you say you wanted another game at draughts?"

"Certainly not," replied Jim. "The strain and mental worry of playing with a duffer like you is enough to drive one mad. Stand where you are, and keep your hands up."

Jim quickly picked up the other half of the cake and promptly ate it, keeping a watchful eye on Mr. Poddy the while.

"Now, take that pannikin," commanded Jim, "go to that pool of water, fill it, and place it on the ground here where I can get it. No tricks, mind, for I can shoot straight, and my finger is on the trigger."

Mr. Poddy sulkily obeyed, with the air of a huge bear that is being forced to go through an undignified performance. Jim picked up the pannikin and drank the contents, with both eyes

on his adversary the while. He then finished the other half of the cake, his late jailer gloomily watching him.

"You're quite sure you wouldn't like a plug of that tabaccy?" he inquired at length. "It's black and strong, and, as I've said, it'll lift the top of your head off."

"I want to keep the top of my head where it is," observed Jim. "But it seems to be a good thing for the growth of the hair, judging by yours. Why don't you invest ten cents in having it cut now and again?"

"Waal now," observed Mr. Poddy somewhat disgustedly, "if you ain't jist like all the rest of them! What's the use of hevin' your hair cut to-day, sez I, when it's goin' to be jist as long again next week? It's jist like that bloke Redfish and his washin' racket. 'Poddy,' he sez to me one day, 'why don't yer wash yer face? It's beastly dirty,' sez he. 'Borack!' sez I. 'Your face would be jist as dirty, too, if you didn't wash. And what is the use of washin' to-day, when you'll be jist as dirty to-morrer?' All rot, I calls it. Some people has queer ways of lookin' at things. I believes in logic, I do."

Jim eyed the dirty philosopher half disgustedly and half amusedly. Mr. Poddy promised to be

an original and entertaining prisoner. He must be marched back to the camp, where he would have to answer some questions of vital importance to them. It was little use doing so now. But Mr. Poddy, like many men of small mental calibre, was also endowed with a certain amount of cunning, and waited his opportunity.

"Hello!" he cried suddenly, and with an unwonted look of animation on his face. "Who's that behind you?"

Jim, taken off his guard, was in the act of looking round, when the enemy stooped with a nimbleness that was surprising in so big a man, and picked up a stone about the size of a cricket-ball. Next moment and Jim's temporary triumph might have been terminated, had not an altogether unexpected thing happened. A dusky figure sprang from a rock close to Mr. Poddy, and that gentleman was dealt a violent blow in a place that—to use a nautical expression—took the wind out of his sails. He staggered forward, hugging himself helplessly, and Big Head—for he was the assailant—completed his timely triumph by following up with another blow that knocked him down. Then Mr. Tapper and Peter Dick sprang from bushes close at hand.

"What ho!" cried Mr. Tapper delightedly.

"Bravo, Jim! Confound you, but you have given us a fright, though I guess Big Head there has suffered most! He thought you were the voice his grandmother keeps on tap. Hello! what's the beggar doing?"

Their greetings were abruptly cut short by the strange behaviour of Big Head, who, intoxicated by his questionable triumph over Mr. Poddy, now sat on that gentleman's chest, while with a long scalping-knife he described a series of fanciful flourishes in air.

"Bless my heart," exclaimed Mr. Tapper, "Big Head is on the war-path; he's going to relieve your late foe of that magnificent head of hair!"

Mr. Poddy at least apprehended such a catastrophe, for his eyes were fairly starting from his head, and he watched the Indian with a baleful light in them. But that his enormous strength was not quite exhausted was abundantly proved, for somehow managing to draw his right knee from under Big Head's body, he planted his foot right in the lower part of the Indian's chest and, with a mighty, lever-like kick, shot his adversary into the air. Big Head came down fully five yards away, with a clatter suggestive of broken bones. His knife rattled amongst the loose stones.

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Mr. Poddy did not attempt further action. He merely sat up and remarked :

"Guess you were a little bit previous, my Beauty !"

Big Head was afraid to get up for a minute or so, lest he should realise his apprehensions that his body was in separate pieces. To do Mr. Poddy justice, he did not seem particularly afraid of his white captors. When, however, he caught sight of Little Dog, he gazed upon him with unspeakable horror and trembled violently. Little Dog regarded him with an inscrutable look on his old, wrinkled face.

"Ough, ough !" he exclaimed. "And so mine enemy with the head of a hog's back and the skin of a skunk thought my body was at the bottom of that pool !"

"Come, come !" interrupted Mr. Tapper. "This is no time for exchanging compliments."

But it was a minute or two before Mr. Poddy could get over his fright and assure himself that the little Indian, whom he thought had committed hara-kiri by leaping over a precipice, was really before him in the flesh. In the meantime Jim had enlightened his friends as to his absence, and explained the fate that Redfish had intended for him.

"The villain!" exclaimed Mr. Tapper. "We have a heavy account to settle with him when we meet. But there is no time to lose. We have to interview this gentleman."

He approached Mr. Poddy, who, seated on the ground, was carefully feeling his extensive legs and arms to assure himself he was all there. The extraordinary feature of the situation was that Mr. Poddy seemed more concerned as to his personal condition than to the unlooked-for appearance of the enemy.

"Look here, my man," said Mr. Tapper sternly; "if your brains have not all run to hair—which appearances would lead one to suppose—I want you to consider what I have to say to you very seriously. None of us are here for the sake of our healths. We have come out to find John Thorne, a man who never did any harm to any one, and whom you and your blackguard mates have hidden away somewhere. You must take us to him. Do you hear? You must swear solemnly right now that you will lead us straight to him; and if you don't, we will certainly tie you up hand and foot and put you somewhere where neither your precious friends nor any one else will be able to find you until such time as we come back for you—if you're still alive—so as to hand

you over to the Police. And then, you can take it from me, you'll dangle at the end of a long rope behind the hay corral at the Police Barracks at Regina. Do you promise to behave yourself, and lead us to where John Thorne is?"

The now crestfallen draught-player seemed to be gradually becoming more fully conscious of the gravity of the situation. He said:

"But s'posin' John Thorne's dead? Mind, I'm not saying he is dead, but I'm mighty sartin that's not Red Herrin's—I mean the boss's—fault. What then?"

"That will depend upon what share you have had in kidnapping him. It will all come out, don't you fear. And what is more, the very man—Redfish—whom I believe to be the originator and leader of the whole diabolical scheme, will be the very man to chuck you all overboard if he can to save his own neck. Man alive, do you think a precious villain like Redfish cares one snap of his fingers for the like of you and your mates? He despises and looks down upon you, and he'll sell you all when it comes to the rub, as sure as fate, and don't you make any mistake about it."

"Ge-whitaker!" exclaimed Mr. Poddy, looking very blank indeed. "Do you tell me that, now?"

Ge-whizz, but it's queer, I've now and again had an idear of something of thet sort myself!"

"It's no use of me telling you that you and your precious mates are a parcel of chuckle-headed fools, because you haven't got sufficient brains to see it," observed Mr. Tapper magnanimously.

"Now that I think of it, he looks a foxy sort," observed Mr. Poddy. "Lor', but I'd like to smack his chops for'm!"

"You can if you like when you come across him again," said Mr. Tapper. "And I guarantee if you're with us long enough on this trip you'll have a chance. Of course, you'll clearly understand your position. You will be our prisoner, and we're not taking chances with you. It will be entirely in your own hands as to how you come out of this business. If I discover the slightest sign of treachery, you are a dead man."

"Come on, then," said Mr. Poddy; "I'm right with you; and if you'd care to have a little game at draughts now and again, I'm your man."

But Mr. Tapper had more serious matters to talk about. He put Mr. Poddy under such a rigorous cross-examination that very soon he had drawn from him many matters that had hitherto puzzled him. To begin with, it was certain that John Thorne was still alive. That Redfish had

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been in Pasqua after the rancher's disappearance was accounted for by the fact that he had gone back to the township in order to avert suspicion, and to recruit more men to checkmate his, Mr. Tapper's, efforts on his behalf. Redfish and his gang had suffered very severely in the fight by the Saskatchewan. It was made plain that but for mutual distrust amongst the kidnappers John Thorne would have been murdered long ago. They knew that their plot had been discovered, and that Tapper and the boys and Indians were on their trail. Quarrels and recriminations were now common amongst the kidnappers. It was certain that Mons would have carried out the wish of Redfish, and have effectually disposed of the rightful owner of the oil-wells, only he feared that the others might turn on him. Although in point of numbers Redfish still held the handle end of the whip, he felt he had embarked on a bigger contract than he had bargained for. It was now too late to draw back, so it was fairly certain the enemy would stick at nothing.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ENEMY SIGHTED

THE only one who seemed grievously disappointed over an understanding being arrived at with Mr. Poddy was Big Head, who had hoped to keep his hand in by operating with his scalping-knife in a tonsorial way upon the enemy. Moreover, Big Head's bones still ached by reason of the very effectual fall Mr. Poddy had given him, and he realised that only a like amount of pain personally administered could help him to forget it. He vowed he would watch the big, ugly prisoner as a cat might a mouse, and woe betide him if for one instant he detected signs of treachery. So well, indeed, for the next few days did the Indian shadow Mr. Poddy, that the latter actually became a victim to nerves, and assured Mr. Tapper that Big Head was only awaiting his opportunity to assassinate him.

Lest Redfish and his gang should by any chance return, they prepared to leave the gully. Little Dog, however, proposed that they should first

rebuild the barricade against the cave, so that any one might imagine it had been undisturbed, and that the victim on the other side was therefore dead. The others saw the wisdom of this, and in five minutes more, what with all hands working at it—Mr. Poddy particularly doing yeoman's service—the cave mouth looked as if it had been left intact. In the meantime Peter Dick had boiled his quart pot and given Jim a very strong half-pint of hot extract of meat. It seemed to put fresh life into him.

They passed down the ravine and entered the valley again. Mr. Poddy walked ahead with Little Dog and Big Head. The only personal luggage this gentleman seemed to possess, apart from the emergency rations he carried in his pockets, was the draughtboard and the pieces pertaining thereto. He had carefully picked them up again after his somewhat unreasonable show of resentment towards these unoffending articles, and insisted on bringing them along with him. As he was not yet entrusted with fire-arms, he stalked along with the draughtboard under his arm instead. Big Head viewed that draughtboard with considerable suspicion. He suspected that it was in reality some new sort of fetish that worked big magic, and he inwardly determined

that it would not be his fault if the folding leather thing with mysterious black and white squares on it did not disappear on the first auspicious occasion.

As it was now late in the day, and Jim was still somewhat stiff and weak owing to the strain he had so lately been subjected to, they only went a few miles, and camped on one of the numerous terraces where they could not well be surprised. During supper their prisoner seemed to have lost sight of his delicate position in the camp, for it was observed his gaze continually rested on the draughtboard and men which he had placed conspicuously in the centre of the large flat slab round which they sat. His obvious train of thought was not encouraged, but before the meal was over he gravely informed Jim that, as doubtless he was thirsting for his revenge, he would be pleased to give him it.

"Goodness forbid!" was the candid and heartfelt response. "If it was a choice between the horrors of that cave and a game with you, Mr. Poddy, I'd prefer the cave."

The shock-headed draught-player did not quite follow, but he repeated the words to himself so as to think it out when he had more time. He was evidently bent on conciliation, for he drew a

coal-black and greasy stick of chewing tobacco from a remote recess of his wonderfully constructed garments, and asked for the loan of a tomahawk to cut it with, intimating his intention of giving them all a treat such as only came once in a lifetime.

"I believe you," observed Mr. Tapper pensively; "once would do the trick. I prefer to die a natural death."

Mr. Poddy glanced suspiciously at Mr. Tapper, but not following the drift of his remarks, asked for the loan of a tomahawk to cut the fig of tobacco. He explained that his pocket-knife would not look at it.

"We are obliged to you," said Mr. Tapper, "but we have no means of getting a new tomahawk in these parts. Anyhow, none of us chew, Poddy. But I've one or two questions to ask you. How far is it from here to where your late mates hold John Thorne as a prisoner?"

"Twenty miles, perhaps, but it might be ten," was the undecided reply; "but what they keep him prisoner for at all, gits over me."

"Quite so," observed Mr. Tapper. "You are candid about it, anyhow. I can't quite make out why they haven't had an accident with John Thorne long ago."

"Waal, it's like this," said the shock-headed one, with simple candour. "I don't suppose there's a mother's son in our mob—unless it's Redfish his blooming self, who's a regular old woman wid his narves—who wouldn't do the trick hisself, that's to say, provided no one else see'd him. You see, we ain't quite the happy fameely one might s'pose. Each one thinks that 'is neighbour is trying to do 'im somehow and get the dead cinch on 'im; an' blow me if I don't believe 'e is! If one on 'em killed John Thorne, t'others would hold it agin 'im. They're a mighty crooked, cross lot, now I think on it."

"And you're one of them yourself," observed Mr. Tapper—"doubtless no better, and perhaps no worse, but, all the same, as choice a candidate for the gallows-tree as they have in the continent of North America, and that's saying a good deal. You speak as if their guilt had only just occurred to you. Don't you know you are liable to be hanged for engaging in this business?"

Mr. Poddy looked uneasy, and his gaze rested fixedly on the draughtboard.

"Waal, don't know as I've thought much about it," he said. "It wir that chap Redfish as said he'd make us all gentlemen, and that the whole affair was as simple as winking. He was mighty

civil when he was mouching around to git us to go in wid 'im; but it strikes me that 'e's one o' them chaps who can't run straight wid even 'is own mates, and that even now 'e's scheming to do us up and scoop the pool.

"That's the grand Nemesis—the wise and retributive Justice that helps to keep human affairs straight," said Mr. Tapper, addressing the boys. "A clever schemer like Redfish, encouraged by a little success, gets bolder and blind to the fact that there are other people in the world just as clever as himself, and so he overdoes his part and lands himself in the end." Turning to Poddy: "Do you think that Redfish left Mr. Thorne behind with those two men in the belief that they would kill him?"

"That's what we all thought," replied Poddy. "As I said, I'll take you to the place, and you can find out for yourself. I'm game to start out now if you like, but your young dook here don't 'xactly look as if he could keep up wid us."

"No; I'm afraid none of us are in a fit condition to start out again just yet," said Tapper. "Besidea, it will be dark in another hour, and in country like this one certainly wants all the daylight one can get. The best thing we can

do is to make a very early start to-morrow morning."

Peter Dick, who had done little save stare in an awe-stricken sort of way at the huge prisoner since he had first seen him, wondered if most desperadoes were such giants as the one now before them. The many stories he had read regarding them had neglected to say much upon this point. Certainly the huge mop of hair, and the clothes which were literally dropping to pieces, were unique in his literary experience of the species. Neither had he ever read of horse-nails and string as being essential to a villain's wardrobe. And the undoubted dirtiness of the man was another unexpected feature. The villains he had mostly read about had been immaculately dressed if they belonged to good society, and picturesquely if they belonged to the brigand type. He wondered if it was possible that a great rough man like Mr. Poddy ever had a mother who used to scold him when he came home from school suspiciously late with a furtive and subdued demeanour, and significant abrasions on the toes of his boots as if caused by climbing stone walls, and ominous rents in his plain but serviceable clothing as if he had been taking observations from the tops

of apple-trees. He burned to know something about the childhood of desperadoes, and the present opportunity was too good to be lost. There was nothing else to do, and Mr. Poddy evidently loved to talk.

"Mr. Poddy," said Peter Dick—who somehow could not think of addressing so big a man, even if he was a prisoner, without giving him the conventional prefix—"I suppose that when you were a boy you used to get into a good many scrapes of one kind and another?"

Poddy looked for a minute or so with evident resentment at his young catechiser before speaking.

"Cricky! what makes you think that?" he observed indignantly.

"Oh, I didn't mean to be rude," said Peter hastily and apologetically; "but I somehow thought you—well, I thought you looked a little that way, you know; but of course it's impossible to judge by appearances." He got very hot, and felt he was making a mess of it.

"Young man," observed Mr. Poddy, adopting quite a dignified and injured air, "if in later life I've been led away by wicked and evil 'sociates, don't you go for to think as how my early youth wasn't as pure and innocent as a

babe's. Whatever does make you think, now, that I used to get into scrapes, as you calls 'em?"

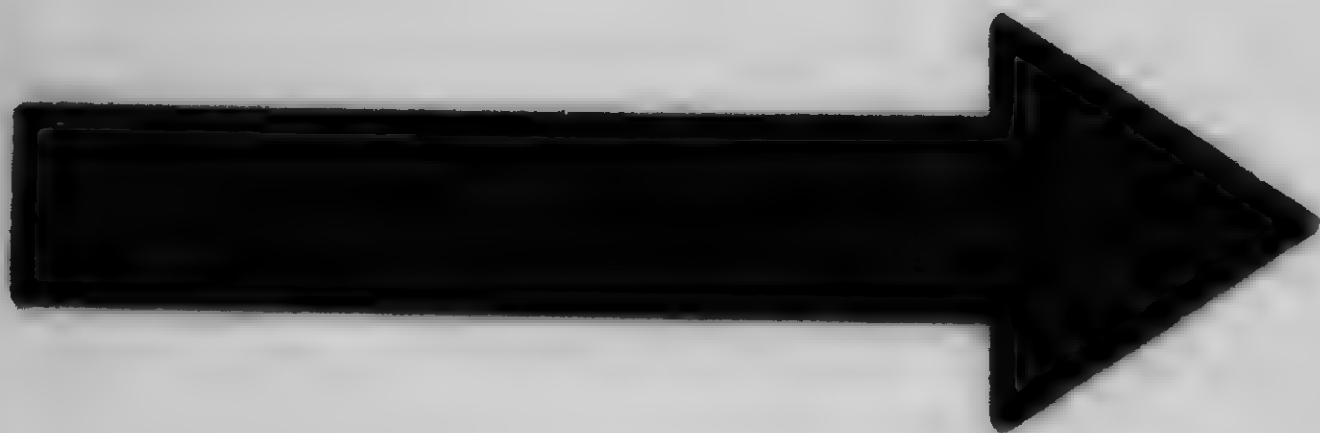
"Well," said Jim, coming to the rescue, "you know you told me to-day that you smoked a whole arm-chair made of cane—elbows, bottom, and all—and you must have been a pretty lively boy to do that."

"Begosh!" exclaimed the desperado blankly, and staring fixedly at a frying-pan as if to get inspiration from it. "Yes, of course; but you see, it was only cane, an' not like as if it was tabaccy. Besides, that chair was my own. I got it from my dear old uncle William when I was a child for a birthday present."

"I thought you told me this afternoon it was your 'poor old dad's,' as you called him?" observed Jim soberly.

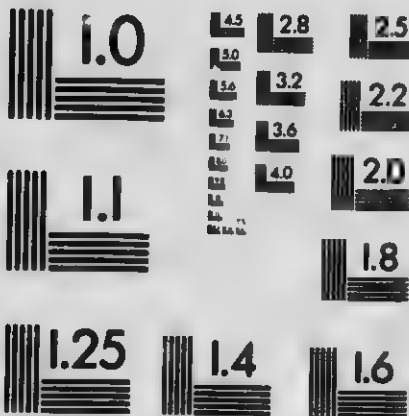
Mr. Poddy ran one hand rather irritably through his great shaggy mane, and rose to the occasion.

"Yes, yes," he said, "but that was another chair—another kind of chair altogether from pore old uncle William's who was shot by flash Harry, the sheriff, 'cos he happened to be keepin' comp'ny unbeknownst wid some crooks who had just stuck up the Butte City coach. Pore Uncle Bill, I never see'd 'im. Died before I was born."



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"But," said Peter Dick coldly, "you have just said you got a cane chair from him as a birthday present. How could he have given you one if he was dead before you were born?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Poddy who seemed to find salvation in the frying-pan, "you see, I quite forgot to tell you I had two uncle Williams—both died suddenly, pore chaps!—one on my father's side, an' one on my mother's. The cane chair I smoked was from the uncle Bill who afterwards died in some gov'nment 'stablishment down Helena way—guess he had somethin' to do wid the gov'nment at the time."

Jim and Peter looked thoughtful, but made no further comments concerning the chairs, while a broad grin, which he in vain strove to suppress, spread over Mr. Tapper's face. Mr. Poddy felt the need of doing something, for he suddenly recollected that in the afternoon he had told them that the chair he had smoked belonged to his father. He at once began to search in his pockets for his tobacco.

"Ah!" he said, as if in a hurry to change the subject, "boys will be boys, as Julius Cæsar or somebody said. I remimbers now when I was a boy down Fargo way in Wyoming, how I blowed up the old schoolhus wid gunpowder, desk, school-

master, an' all. I finished my edycation about ther—never went to school no more."

The giant gazed reminiscently into the fire, and puffed vigorously at his short black pipe.

"Blew up the schoolhouse!" exclaimed Peter Dick. "Well, you must have been a very—well, a very lively boy indeed. How did you manage to do that, Mr. Poddy? I'd like to hear about that ever so much."

Poddy chuckled to himself and began to feel important. He concentrated his gaze upon the frying-pan, and observed a discreet silence. The boys became impatient.

"Ough, ough! Give the big man time," said Little Dog. "I can smell from here the tobacco he smokes, and it is sure to help him to see many wonderful things in the inside of his head."

Poddy treated this interruption with contempt, and proceeded.

"It was in Bottineau in Dakota where I was raised and went to school," he began, when he was interrupted by Jim.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Poddy, but I thought you said you were brought up and went to school at Fargo in Wyoming?"

Poddy glanced at his interrupter sharply, and said :

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"And so I was, but that was at first, and my uncle William who arterwards died sudden, and with whom I was fetched up, took it into his head to remove to Bottineau. Don't be so mighty pertic'lar, young man, if you wants to hear this story. You mustn't chip in like that an' show as how you were raised without being teached manners."

"Please don't interrupt, Jim," said Peter. "Let Mr. Poddy tell us the story in his own way. You see, it is a long time since the affair happened, and he can't be expected to remember every little detail."

"Oh, go ahead!" exclaimed Jim. "Go ahead! Let him tell the story his own way. I shouldn't have interrupted."

Jim had probably not yet recovered from the mental strain he had undergone when playing draughts with his jailer, so allowances had to be made for him. Seeing Poddy preserved silence, he thought a little prompting might be judicious, and so continued:

"When you were a boy at school in Fargo in Wyeming——"

"Yes, yes," said Poddy, waking up, and not noticing the substitution of the place he had formerly objected to. "It was at Fargo, and

a lively little place it was in those days, too, you can bet your bottom dollar on that. The school was outside the township, and sometimes there'd be as many as thirty or forty boys and guyrles at that school—that's to say, when they wasn't seeding, or scaring the crows from the seed, or pulling up the weeds, or harvesting, or doing the chores in the winter time, you onderstan'. An' they was big boys and guyrles, too, you can lay to it, seein' as how thir niver was more than three months in the year that them kiddies could git to school, an' so they had to keep longer on to it, you onderstan'."

Mr. Poddy stopped for a minute or two, to take several hard draws at his pipe before continuing.

"They was a wild lot, they was, them boys an' guyrles, seein' as how they niver got much of a holiday 'xcept when they were at school. They sorter looked upon the schoolmaster—Ebenezer Low—as 'specially sent inter the world to give them a good time when they had nothin' better to do. That was at first, for afore he had bin six weeks ' Bottineau—the privious schoolmarm havin' a sudden-like widout her wages—they found that he was a bit of an ole fox, was Ebenezeer, and ginrally managed to git his change back an' something more afore he was

done wid them. For all that, he was a thin, little, dried-up crathur wid a pair of specs, an' a way wid him as if he was always beggin' pardon for bein' there at all. At fust we all leid low, so's to give 'im the idear as how we wir quite a 'xemplary and well-conditioned lot of boys an' guryls, an' it was prime fun to see how ole Ebenezear seemed to be took in wid it, an' rubbed 'is hands an' patted us on the boko, an' called us all his dear children an' sich like. Cricky, but he seemed a green ole lot, an' more fit to take tea wid some o' preachers ole wimmen than look arter us! What was more, he 'peared to be very deaf, and used to put 'is hand to the side of his head s'posin' he wanted to hear us."

Mr. Poddy stopped to rake his pipe-stem with a piece of long grass, and on completion of the same, continued:

"But we was laying low an' wondering how we could take a rise out of 'im. When we saw he was so precious green we made up our minds either to put a rattler—rattlesnake, you savvy—in his desk, or blow up the ole place, or do somethin' that would make a stir. Now, there was one boy at thet school, an' he was as contrairy an' wicked a feller as one could wish to fall in wid. His name was Tom Johnson, an'

a lazier, meaner, spitefuller cove ginrally thir warn't in the township. He was big, an' knowed it, an' took advantage o' that same, you bet. All the same, thir warn't no rale grit in 'im. He was bully at bluff, an' the size of him helped 'im through. Besides, he was older than most of us, an', I might say, a precious deal more ignorant.

"Well, one day, what does Tom Johnson do but marches up close to me as we wir a-settin' in school, and says he, 'look here, Bill Poddy, I'se got a tin o' gunpowder I borrowed somewheres, an' I've got a miner's fuse—burns five minits, it does—an' I wants you to slip up to ole coon's desk next time he goes to t'other end of room, an' put it in thar. We can strike a match afore you does it, an' he won't hear it. I'll give you an almighty whackin' s'posin' you doesn't do it.'

"But I told him thet though the ole boy was deaf he wasn't to speak so loud, as the others might hear. Mister Low sot jist like an' ole rooster, as if he was only asleep on one side of 'is head. But Tom he only laughs an' calls me a little—somethin' or other—an' says that the ole fossil was deaf as a door-post anyhow.

"Howmsoever, he gives me a pinch, jist to make me remimber like, for he was a much bigger cove

than me, an' next time master goes to t'other end of the room, Tom strikes a match, lights the fuse of the canister—wrapped all round it like—and givin' me another pinch, tells me to look oncommon smart about it. Seein' I was more frightender of Tom than of master, I nips up an' does it, though mighty scared I was all the same. Still, I felt like seein' the racket inside that des^k. as soon as the powder caught, an' thought it would be funny to see master drop off that tall three-legged stool soon as the thing went off bang.

“But, as them play-actin' chaps say, ‘It was not to be’; for jist then up comes master from t'other end of room, an' says he, quite sweet and soft-like, ‘Tom Johnson, I wants to see what yew look like a-settin' on that there stool alongside my desk. Quick, up wid you, lad!’

“You never see'd a feller took so aback in all your born days as was Tom Johnson when he heard Ebenezear say that. But Tom was a big chap, an' so he up an' tells master as how he was goin' home to drive in the cows an' so he couldn't oblige him that day. And then he swaggers to the door to make himself scarce.

“But I niver in all my life see'd such a change in a man as comed over Ebenezear Low. He up

sharp to Tom Johnson, and he hits him a smack over the side of the head before you could say 'winkin', an' he says, says 'e, 'Up you go, you lout; an' look jolly sharp about it, too, or I'll knock you into the middle of next week!' And Tom he looks at 'im surprised like, an' gets white about the gills, and, to the 'stonishment of every boy and guyr in that school who had heerd him say as he intended to knock the stuffin' out of ole Ebenezear very fust chance he got, he up, an' after movin' that stool a fut or two nearer the wall, mounts it and keeps lookin' at that desk as if it wir full of rattlers.

"'Now then,' says master, sharp-like, 'Number One'—meaning first form—'will retire.' Then he gave the order Number Two, and so on until the schollards was all outside; an' there they kept lookin' in through the winders at Tom, wonderin' what was up. For master had gone inter schoolhouse again, and told Tom how if he moved from that stool he'd scalp 'im for a dead certainty. I niver saw a boy look so sick in all my life as did Tom. Ebenezear opens all the winders, an' he tells us to stand well back; an' when Tom was jest lookin' as if he was going to faint, off went that canister of powder wid a bang that pretty well wrecked that desk and sent

Tom flying off his stool backwards, where he lay for two or three minits swearing he was killed and dead.

"But master said as how he'd bring him to life again, an' fetchin' him outside by the scruff of the neck, he gave him a wallop in' wid a cane as was edifyin' to witness. Tom howled, but it was no use; Ebenezeer showed as how he was master in more ways, than one. Tom couldn't sit down for a week arter that.

"An' then master calls me to 'im, an' afore I knowed what was comin'—or I'd have cleared, you kin bet your boots on it—he had me by the neck too, an' if any one had told me as how a little, dried-up, mild-lookin' tenderfoot like that could give me what 'e did gif me, I'd hev said as how 'e lied."

Mr. Poddy stopped, and there was a dead silence for a minute.

"He must have given you both an awful whacking," observed Peter solemnly.

"Whacking!" repeated the desperado scornfully. "Whacking! Waal, I sometimes feels it now!" And, as if mechanically, his right hand strayed behind him. "Yes, I guess that Ebenezeer Low was a take-in an' no mistake. He was no more deaf than we was. When Tom

Johnson's farther, who was a big hearty chap too, comed to master to ask 'im what 'e' bin a-doin' to Tom, so's 'e could make sossidge meat of 'im before all the school, what does Ebenezeer up and do but tells Tom's farther that if 'e doesn't clear mighty smart 'e'll serve him same as Tom. An' the curius thing was that Tom's farther jist looked at 'im and cleared—vamossed the ranch, an' made no bones about it, as one might say."

"Ebenezer must have been good stuff," observed Mr. Tapper. "Those little chaps have often more in them than the big ones."

"But," said the critical Jim, "although your story is a good one, Mr. Poddy, there's someth'g I don't quite follow. It doesn't matter so much about the uncertainty of the locality, or which uncle William—if any—you happened to be staying with at the time, but I understood you to say that you blew up the schoolmaster and the school-house, and scored generally. Whereas it seems to have been the other way about, and Ebenezer Low scored over you and Tom Johnson, and gave you both a particularly warm time of it."

Poddy withdrew his pipe from his mouth, and his under-jaw dropped. There was a far-away look in his eyes. But he speedily recovered, and testily said :

"Waal, young man, I niver did come across such a stoopid as you—can't git anything inter yer head, one can't! Thet affair I'se jest bin tellin' you of happened at Fargo. When we succeeded in blowing up the schoolmaster and schoolhouse it was at Bottineau. I'se not come to that yet."

And whether he would ever have come to it in the ordinary course of mundane events is extremely problematical; but just then came a distraction. A rifle-shot rang out far down the valley. Next moment it was succeeded by another. They all sprang to their feet.

"Look," cried Little Dog, as he pointed to a dim and distant terrace. "One man running, and two men after him."

"Quick," cried Tapper excitedly. "It may be John Thorne escaping from his jailers. Jim, you stay here. Peter, you go with Little Dog and Big Head that way. Poddy, you come with me; and goodness help you if you play any tricks. Hurry up there!"

Mr. Tapper was right in his surmises. It was the missing rancher, John Thorne, whom they saw running and pursued by two of the kidnappers. It is therefore necessary to relate how such a situation came about.

CHAPTER XXIX

A NIGHTMARISH SCENE

HAD it not been for Mr. Poddy and the mutual distrust existing amongst the kidnapers, John Thorne would undoubtedly have been killed. One man who would most certainly have thought about such a climax was Mons, *alias* Morris, the specious alien adventurer. He was a bully and possessed considerable influence with the others, partly owing to his claims to being considered a medical man. In civilisation he had called himself Dr. Morris; but then, strangely enough, there is no law against one doing this. But Mr. Poddy largely discounted his pretensions. These two men hated and suspected each other. Mons at first had tried to lord it over Poddy, but the latter, somewhat to the adventurer's surprise, soon saw through and resented such obsession, with the result that the coarse foreign fraud had to embark on fresh tactics. He tried hard to induce John Thorne to make a dash for liberty, in order that he might have an opportunity of shooting

him down. It was Poddy himself who warned the rancher as to this dastardly scheme.

That Poddy, indeed, at times was quite normal intellectually was made patent by the fact that when Redfish broadly hinted that he was surprised he still burdened himself with a prisoner, the easy-going kidnapper remarked it was not likely he was going to get rid of any one as long as he was associated with a fellow like Mons, who would assuredly round upon him whenever it suited his purpose. It was owing to this complaint that Redfish, when Poddy had disappeared, and when he found that Mons was no longer to be trusted, made a change in the prisoner's guard.

John Thorne had contracted a touch of malarial fever, a comparatively rare thing in the West, and was one day lying down on the grass covered by a blanket, when an opportunity of escape presented itself. The others were out reconnoitring, and his two guards, having made up their minds that under the circumstances he would not attempt to move, had strolled off for half-an-hour or so to stretch their legs, as they expressed it. They had become thoroughly sick of the enforced inaction. As soon as Mr. Thorne was convinced that his guards had gone, he peeped from under his blanket and prepared for flight.

He was just about to hurry away when he observed the blankets of his jailers, and it flashed upon him that if he rolled some of them up—not all, for in that case they would miss them—and placed them under his rug, in the form of a dummy, they would naturally think when they came back he was still there. He placed them in position and started off.

But he had awful luck. After running in one direction for at least half-an-hour, he found himself on a species of elevated peninsula with precipitous sides going sheer down on either hand. The broken country of the so-called Bad Lands is, as most people know, the most fantastic and exasperating in the world. For instance, supposing one is making over the plain or plateau to a certain point, perhaps all at once a narrow cañon or fissure several hundred feet deep may open up right at one's feet, and one has got to follow round its great gap-toothed edge for a score of miles, and perhaps have to come back to within a short distance of the place one started from, in order to get clear of this species of cul-de-sac.

It was upon such a place that John Thorne had blundered. He was brought up by a gulch which yawned at his feet, and the bottom of which he

could not see. No use trying to negotiate it. Merely to look over the brink was to become sick and dizzy. It was a bitter disappointment, but there it was, and the only thing left for him to do was to retrace his steps or strike out in another direction.

Weak as he was, John Thorne did not hesitate. He turned and ran in the opposite direction. He realised that, whichever way he took, he could not be sure of ultimately getting clear away. That gigantic and erratic fissure in the earth—a notable example of erosion—might pull him up at any moment.

It was the knowledge of the difficulties confronting their prisoner if he tried to escape that had, doubtless, contributed to the negligence of his guards. Indeed, he had been gone some time when the latter returned and caught sight of him still in the immediate neighbourhood.

The first thing that apprised the fugitive that he was detected was a bullet whistling past him. Still John Thorne knew that his guard would prefer retaking to shooting him down, for in the latter case their dereliction of duty would come to light. By the wildness of their shooting he was strengthened in this opinion. He made for a gap he caught sight of in some high ground

about a mile distant. If he could only reach that, he thought he might have a chance of concealing himself in one of the numerous caves or gullies before his pursuers came up. He was now becoming fatigued, but still he kept on, buoyed up by hope. Then, to his no little surprise and delight, he heard the sound of firing other than that of his pursuers. He guessed it must be that of those whom he knew by this time were following Redfish and his gang up in order to rescue him. But the annoying feature of this fresh development was that he could not make out from what direction the fresh firing came. Owing to the broken and irregular nature of the surrounding country there were echoes which confused him.

At this point it is necessary to revert to his friends who had caught sight of him, and were endeavouring to attract his attention.

Mr. Tapper and Poddy started off at a sharp trot. Although both big men, the active open-air life they had led had kept them fit and in condition, so that they covered the ground quickly. They kept on up one of the gradually rising terraces commanding a view of the opposite plateau, for they had noticed that there was no way up on the side where the escaping man and

his pursuers were. Moreover, by following their present course they would be able to get within easy shooting distance of them, as the valley bore round to the right. Within ten minutes they were at a point commanding a view of the pursued and the pursuers.

They were not more than five hundred yards away, and the man who was setting the pace was actually outdistancing his pursuers.

"It's Mr. Thorne," said Poddy. "I'd know him anywhere; an' that's Jackson and Smart after him."

"He's getting away from them," said Tapper. "We must fire and attract his attention, for he's going the wrong way."

"Fire to attract his attention!" snorted Poddy. "Fire to pot that blooming big-mouthed Smart," says. If you won't do it, just lend us that gun."

Poddy seemed earnest enough, but Tapper had lived too long in the wild West to be caught napping. Moving a few feet away from Poddy, he was about to lie down so as to take a steady aim, when his companion, fairly stamping his feet with impatience, cried:

"Hurry up—hurry up—or they'll pot him if you don't!"

And, surely enough, one of the chasers had stopped and was kneeling so as to get a steadier aim. Tapper put his gun to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. At the same moment the pursuer fired. Tapper's bullet must have passed perilously close to him, for he was seen to duck violently. He looked around wildly, then made off to some rocks that offered cover. But the other continued on his way, and Tapper sent a bullet after him also. This caused him to stop for a moment, and then he, too, made a bee-line for the rocks already mentioned. The fugitive also stopped for an instant, as if puzzled over this fresh distraction, then ran towards a gap in the ridge some distance ahead. He was going straight away from those who would have saved him.

Tapper was beside himself with vexation. He fired his rifle in order to attract his notice, but the echoes were such in that broken country that doubtless the fugitive thought the firing came from the direction of the gap towards which he was running. It was useless of them to think of making after him, for the valley with precipitous cliffs lay between.

And now a fresh horror was added to the situation. It was Poddy who first detected it.

"Ge-whitaker!" he cried. "Just look—Red-fish and the others are coming down the very *coulée* Thorne's making for! Goodness, if that ain't running bang into the lion's mouth wid a vengeance!"

The scene was harrowing as that of a nightmare. From where they were, they could distinctly see several men lurking in the cutting waiting for their victim. They were, doubtless, passing rude witticisms at his expense. It was not every day that an escaping prisoner reversed the ordinary modes of procedure and came running back into the arms of his former captors.

"It's no use, Poddy—no use at all!" exclaimed Tapper. "If we fired on them they'd only vent their anger upon Mr. Thorne. Keep out of sight. We can do no good now."

Indeed, all they could do was to watch the painful finish. The two men who had been pursuing could be seen dodging amongst the boulders and slowly following up their victim. They, doubtless, knew that he was running right back into the arms of their comrades, so that they need not worry. They were behind him anyhow, and should anything cause him to turn they would cut off his retreat. It was harrowing to think that Mr. Thorne—for surely it could be

no other—after managing to escape, and being so near those who had come to rescue him, should actually turn and run away from them. But the latter were powerless; even had they numbered as many as the enemy, they could not get at them. Like men in a nightmare they could only watch the tragic sequel. And, after all, seeing it was useless to try and aid John Thorne, it was as well he did not have the added chagrin of knowing that his friends had been so near.

They saw the fugitive approach the entrance to the gap; then, just as he entered it, with the precision of automatons several men sprang up, and rifles were levelled at him. They saw the trapped one throw up his hands as with a gesture of despair, and then, as if desperate, confront them boldly with clenched fists. He certainly did not want for pluck. Tapper groaned.

"It's a mad thing to do!" he cried. "They'll kill him for a certainty!"

For one rash moment he was almost tempted to fire into the cowardly mob; but the risk was too great, and it would only make matters worse.

"Cricky!" exclaimed Poddy, and he breathed heavily with suppressed excitement. "Blow me, if he ain't offering to take 'em all on!"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tapper; "and they're going to gratify his wishes, but the odds are cruel."

What induced a couple of the desperadoes to lay down their rifles and prepare to capture Thorne unarmed, it is difficult to say. Probably they now realised the great risk they ran if they killed him outright, and distrusting one another as they did, they did not want to give their mates any undue pull over them. As it was, two of them approached him on either side; and though John Thorne must have been considerably winded and fagged by his long run, still he tackled them in what must have been unexpected style.

He waited quietly till the two men were close to him; then stepping sharply towards the one on the right, he launched such a sharp and workman-like blow at his head that the man went down like a ninepin. This was the chance for villain Number Two, who made a spring in upon him. But John Thorne must have known perfectly well he would do this, for skilfully springing on one side as his antagonist passed and missed him, he gave him such a blow on the neck that the recipient must have thought that it was broken. He was sent headlong into the arms of an interested brother conspirator, and bowled that gentleman over as if he had been a lay figure. The two fell together

in a confused heap, and mutual recriminations of a serious nature undoubtedly ensued. Then a third man raised his rifle and approached from behind to fell the refractory prisoner; but somehow the latter had divined his presence, and turning, rushed in upon his attacker, caught his rifle, wrested it from his hands, and felled him with his own weapon.

"Bravo!" cried Tapper, quivering with excitement. "If only they were unarmed he'd fix the whole lot of them!"

But the patience of the pursuers was now exhausted, and with a combined rush they closed upon their victim, beat down his guard, and bore him to earth. There had not been time to shoulder and use the weapon properly.

Poddy fairly stamped on the ground with his dilapidated brogues, and worked his arms up and down as if exercised with conflicting emotions. Very likely he had a certain malicious satisfaction in seeing some of his late overbearing comrades get more than they bargained for, and he was sorry to see the man who had done it once more a prisoner.

As for Tapper, he could hardly bear to look longer upon what was taking place. Their inability to render any assistance was a bitter thing.

"It is to be hoped they will do him no serious injury," said Tapper. "But those fellows are desperate now, and there is no saying to what lengths they may go. Look, they are cutting across that plateau. We must follow them up and run them to earth. They evidently intend to make down the valley, so the best thing we can do is to find the others, then follow close on the tracks of those chaps. They can hardly escape us."

"Come on!" exclaimed Poddy. "Come on!"

CHAPTER XXX

A BOLD DEED

MR. TAPPER and Poddy hurried back to camp, and as luck would have it, they found that the others, having also sighted the enemy and being unable to follow them, had hurried back to apprise Jim of their probable prolonged absence.

"I've been thinking over matters," said Tapper, "and have come to the conclusion that John Thorne must be got out of the hands of those fiends at once, by hook or by crook. Goodness only knows what he must be suffering at their hands! I have a scheme, and it may seem to you a desperate one, I admit, but I'm going to put it into operation this very night. Its success will depend on more than one thing, but I think that because it is apparently such a bold and desperate measure, the enemy are not likely to apprehend it, and therefore may be taken by surprise. You, Jim and Peter, will stop here with Poddy and Big Head, and Little Dog will come with me. It will probably be some time to-morrow before we are back."

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Seeing a certain blank look on Jim's face give place to one of serious speculation, he addressed himself to him.

"I see what you're thinking about," he continued; "and, of course, there is just a chance that both of us may be prevented from rejoining you. Now, if we're coming back at all—and I think you may be very hopeful on that score, for both of us have a very decided objection to dying yet awhile—we'll be back before midday to-morrow, in all probability very much sooner. If by any chance we don't turn up, and you don't see us coming, you must make your way back to Pasqua. I have every confidence in Big Head leading you safely back. He will do so as ably as any Indian in the Territories. There you must tell the whole story to the Mounted Police, and what with their half-breed and Indian scouts, they will find out for a certainty everything that has happened."

He turned to Poddy and addressed him.

"Remember, Poddy, that whatever may happen, every one of your late comrades is going to be brought to justice sooner or later and may have to swing. If you want to escape the same fate you will be wise and stick to us. Anyhow, the chances are that your late friends have now got it in for

you, and if you went back to them it is fairly certain that, no matter what you said, they would put an end to you."

"That's so," said Poddy in a matter-of-fact way. "They'd put out my lights—scrag me, you savvy—and no blooming mistake about it. But I ain't giving them a chance, and you can make your mind easy about that, or you can do t'other thing—just as you jolly well please." Mr. Poddy, if seemingly somewhat mixed at times, at least did not mince matters.

Before he went, Tapper took Jim aside and gave him some very plain instructions as to what he should do with Poddy if he suspected treachery. The main thing was not to give him a chance. To do Mr. Poddy justice, when he found that his new comrades, or rather custodians, were fair-dealing and treated him a good deal better than he knew he had any right to expect, and contrasting their attitude with that of his old mates whom he suspected of poking fun at him, he came to the conclusion that he had not made such a very bad bargain after all. Moreover, he was beginning to suspect that men who were extra clever in their own estimation generally met with others cleverer than themselves in the end. He also liked the boys, and could foresee

a good time with them if they would only cultivate a taste for draughts and certain other games.

Peter Dick was rather disappointed being left behind, but he realised that their leader had good reasons for what he did.

Tapper and Little Dog had a stiff walk before them, and they had to hurry on so as to overtake the enemy and study their camping-ground thoroughly before it grew dark. By cutting across a neck of land they saved a couple of miles, and then, fortunately, Little Dog discovered a way into the valley that cut off at least another mile. The twilight was coming on apace when they caught sight of the kidnappers in the valley bottom, and threading their way amongst a chaos of great boulders, make for a break in the face of the cliff.

"It is a cave," said Little Dog. "There are many such all about here, and it may run a long way in. They will leave a man or two some distance out from the mouth of it."

"That is very likely, and it will be awkward," commented Tapper thoughtfully.

"They may go to sleep—men like them generally do," observed Little Dog. "If they don't, and we find we cannot pass them, I will undertake to surprise them if they are not too close

together, and no one but themselves will be any the wiser."

"I don't want to leave things too much to chance," said Tapper. "If I can pass them going in, I will undertake to deal with them should they discover us coming out."

Little Dog made no comment, but he would have preferred to deal with them at the start off. Still, he knew that Tapper had considerable experience with such men as they were about to deal with, and he fully recognised the principle of implicit obedience on an expedition of the kind.

They had to observe the greatest caution, for it would be fatal to Tapper's plans if Redfish's gang discovered that any one was following. They crept to within half a mile of the gully that ended in what Little Dog averred was a cave, and ensconced themselves in a nook where they were not likely to be disturbed until it was time for them to act. Tapper communicated his plans to Little Dog, and though it was obvious that the Indian had very little faith in the venture, still he only said that his friend Tapper could rely upon him fulfilling his part of the programme to the best of his ability.

When the moon rose they distinctly saw three

of the kidnappers leave the gully and take up positions some little distance apart and about two hundred yards from the entrance. They could see them go behind rocks and light their pipes. As Little Dog had said, such men were poor sentinels. Instead of placing themselves on either side of the gully where they could see an enemy approach and defend the entrance, they only had one half of the approach under observation. There would be neither difficulty nor danger in slipping in behind their backs. At the same time, to attempt to overpower them might only create such a disturbance that those in the cave would be alarmed and their object would be defeated.

As it was useless attempting to do anything for at least a few hours, when every one would be likely to be sleeping soundly, it was a weary wait. As for the watchers, it was fairly certain that they would try to keep watch by turns, and that they would go to sleep. They were opposite the entrance to the gully, and surely an enemy must pass them if he came that way.

The moon was now well up above the edge of the opposite hillside, and three or four terribly tedious hours had passed, when Tapper whispered to Little Dog :

"I'll try it now, Little Dog. You watch these men, and don't let them enter the cave when I'm there. At least, should you do so, you must take care to be near enough to prevent them doing any mischief. The only danger will be that they may take it into their heads to do something before I am ready for them."

"I will do what I can," said Little Dog. "It would be a mistake to interfere with them too soon."

Next moment Tapper was crawling in the shadow towards the entrance of the cave. Even had the sentries not been asleep, he would have had no difficulty in passing them. Cautiously he entered the gully, which narrowed still more as it pierced the hillside. Fortunately, there was strong moonlight, otherwise it would have been impossible to negotiate the passage without a light. The cliff contracted till it closed over his head, and he entered the cave proper. The next twenty yards or so in the darkness was the most difficult part of all; but he successfully went ahead until he saw a ruddy gleam, and turning a corner, he found himself in a vaulted chamber, in the middle of which was a log fire. Lying round it, wrapped in their blankets, were several men. He could see that the cave went still further back, and he suspected

that their prisoner lay there in the shadow. It would be folly to attempt to pass them. He must compel these men to do his bidding while he covered them with his Colt's revolver. Then a sleeper stirred, opened his eyes, and his gaze rested on Tapper.

"Hold up your hands," cried Tapper; "and if you make a fuss you're a dead man!"

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CHAPTER XXXI

A HORNET'S NEST

At the sound of Tapper's voice the drowsy one lifted his head and glared at him as if he beheld a visitant from another world. He seemed unable to comprehend all at once the full meaning of the imperious command to put up his hands. Two of the other sleepers stirred and sat up, and one of them passed a hand over his eyes as if to dispel some trick of the brain.

"The first man who puts a hand on his gun I'll shoot as dead as a herring," said Tapper in a cold, dispassionate voice.

A billet of resinous wood flared up and disclosed a strange scene. There were the blank, white, frightened faces of the awakened sleepers, and, thrown into strong relief, the striking figure of the bold intruder with his set, grim face behind the large-size Colt's revolver, on the metal work of which the firelight gleamed.

"Put your hands up and keep them up," commanded Tapper. "You don't suppose I came

here without knowing what I was doing. You fellows must be mad to think you can kidnap a man in Canada. I never met men yet try harder to get to the gallows than you. I want John Thorne, and if you've hurt a hair of his head you'll swing for it as surely as there is law in Canada."

"Steady, boss," said one of the kidnappers, whose hands were twitching nervously as he held them in front of him on a level with his face. "You've got the dead drop on us this trip, I reckon. How did you get here?"

"As a good few more who are not very far away got here. Do you suppose that fellows like you can get out of the country—and you're going in the wrong direction, anyhow—when the Mounted Police from the Red River to the Rockies are on your trail? But I'm not here to explain matters to you. John Thorne must walk out of this cave while I stand here, and then such of you as are only tools in the hands of Redfish—who intends to fool you all before he has done with you—may have a chance of leaving the country without further ado."

"Waken the boss," cried one of the desperadoes to the man next him. "You hear what

he says—that thet blooming red-herring 'ntends to fool us."

But Mr. Redfish himself was now awake and sitting up, and a ghastly and unpleasant spectacle he presented. He was deadly pale, and the cut over his right temple, effected by the rifle Little Dog had hurled at him, stood out red and livid from its bloodless background. His greenish-grey eyes glared at Tapper with mingled malevolence and fear.

"Hello, it's you! What do you want?" he exclaimed, with that insulting intonation in his voice that made him cordially detested by those from whom he had nothing to gain.

"Drop that with me, Redfish," said Tapper sharply. "It is you who are at the other end of this shooting-stick; and, by Jove, I'll let you have a bullet through your foxy skull as sure as you're sitting there, if you attempt to bluff me! I've come for John Thorne, the man whose goodness to you has been so ill repaid. I warn you again that if you argue any more I'll pull the trigger."

"Much good that'll do you and your precious friend!" observed one of the gang, who seemed somewhat more at his ease than the others, and whose evil face bore traces of a malicious grin

as he stole a glance at the ill-concealed terror of his ostensible leader. "Redfish ain't afraid of your shooting-iron, and he's prepared to argy the matter with you right now.—Ain't you, boss?"

"Shut up, Joe Cox," snapped Redfish angrily. "My brains aren't in your keeping. Don't you see he isn't fooling with that pistol?"

One or two of the others grinned in a pleased fashion at the obvious fear of their leader, despite their own disquietude. It was not the first time some of them had been obliged to put up their hands.

"What makes you think we have taken Thorne prisoner?" asked Redfish, who was doubtless prepared for such an emergency. "Now, supposing Thorne himself saw fit to keep out of the way of certain creditors for a while until his affairs come all right again, and you, who call yourself a friend of his, by your interfering, meddlesome nature spoiled his game and that of those who are helping him, what sort of a fool would you call yourself, I'd like to know?"

"In that case, as I am a friend of his, the course to take is a plain one," said Tapper. "Produce John Thorne, and let him tell me himself that my interference has been uncalled

for, and I'll take my departure at once, and those who are with me; and what's more, I'll make you every reparation that lies in my power. But I don't believe your blackguard suggestion for one moment. I came for John Thorne. Produce him."

As he spoke he had drawn nearer the little group, for the vein of resin in the log had given out and, to his great concern, the place was in semi-darkness. He could only dimly see the forms that lay around the fire. He detected one of them moving an arm towards something that lay near his head.

"You there!" he cried; and the muzzle of his revolver pointed at the owner of the surreptitious hand. "Back with that hand instantly or I'll put a bullet through your head. Quick, I say!"

By the dim light he could see that the hand was sharply withdrawn.

"Now, produce John Thorne," cried Tapper. "John Thorne, are you there?" he shouted, his voice filling the rocky chamber and repeating itself in a remarkable series of echoes. It was evident that this cave penetrated for a considerable distance into the mountain-side.

Then from the gloomy archway at the far side

there came a shout and a scuffle as of hurrying feet.

"Tapper, is that you—Tapper, my friend?" cried some one in the darkness. But the voice stopped abruptly as if a hand was placed across the mouth of the speaker, and there was a sound as of two men struggling.

Tapper was in the act of calling to him when he heard footsteps behind him. He realised it was not Little Dog, for the latter wore moccasins, and the man who was entering the cave wore boots. He was now in a most desperate predicament, and he wondered how Little Dog had allowed this man to enter. He backed to the side of the cave and to where it took the turn that led direct to the entrance. He still covered the men on the ground with his revolver. Then a shadowy figure showed in the gloom of the archway, and a voice sang out:

"Hello! Halt there! I see you!—Who is your visitor, Redfish?—Stand still there or I'll blow you to Kingdom Come!"

But almost before the words had left the lips of the new-comer, a stone came crashing down upon his head, and his revolver went off in air.

"Quick, brother. Get out of this, quick. There are two more of them coming!" And Little Dog,

who had not been able to intercept the enemy sooner, managed to save the situation at the last moment.

There was a very pandemonium in the cave. The resin had given out in the log, and one of the desperadoes, in his haste to get at his rifle, tripped across one end of it and fell amongst the glowing ashes. He yelled with rage and pain as he rolled out of them, and, fortunately for the intruders, still further added to the confusion by getting in the way of his mates who stumbled over him. They in their turn delayed the pursuit by stopping to administer revengeful kicks upon his prostrate body.

Tapper realised that his daring and dangerous scheme had failed, and that his only hope lay in flight.

"Remember," he cried aloud, "you all hang if you hurt a hair of Thorne's head." And next moment he was gone.

But he and Little Dog were still in desperate plight, for, as they rounded the turn of the gallery that led to the entrance, a succession of revolver shots rang out. But that this action was more fraught with danger to themselves than to the enemy was obvious. For Redfish was heard yelling to the reckless shooter to cease firing, as he had just received a bullet through his shirt.

CHAPTER XXXII

BEFORE THE STORM

IN point of fact, it might have been the most fortunate thing that could have happened to Tapper and Little Dog if the desperadoes in the cave had only kept on firing, for in that case they would most assuredly have exterminated themselves. As it was, they were mostly afraid to move for fear of the consequences, and so made little attempt at pursuit. They relieved their feelings by abusing such of their comrades as they knew were somewhere present in the darkness, and who would be least likely to attempt reprisals.

As for Tapper and Little Dog, as they suddenly emerged from the gloom of the cave into the starlight they were confronted by two of the guard, who, having been startled by the weird riot inside, were probably under the impression that their comrades had quarrelled amongst themselves and were indulging in a free fight under difficulties. As they wisely had no other desire than that of espousing the side of the winning party, they

were in no particular hurry to enter the cave. So, when Tapper and Little Dog rushed out upon them, they were not only taken by surprise, but were for quite a few minutes afterwards unable to account for the summary action meted out to them.

Villain Number One was promptly knocked down by Tapper, and his rifle went clattering on to the loose rocks. Number Two was butted by Little Dog in a place disallowed by the rules of Queensberry, with the result that he fell back helplessly, and lay there gasping for breath under the impression that his misspent life was fast drawing to a close. He felt too bad even to moralise or make fresh resolutions in the event of recovery.

Under other circumstances Tapper would have made prisoners of these men, but he did not know how soon the kidnappers in the cave would sally out, like angry bees from a disturbed hive, and send a volley after them. They were four to one in any case, and if they wished to rescue John Thorne it would not do to throw their lives away. Now that they were safely making good their escape in cover of the darkness, Tapper realised what an almost mad enterprise he had been engaged in. But in one point he had succeeded: the enemy now knew that

their kidnapping scheme was exposed, and they had been warned that if John Thorne came to grief in their hands they would have to swing on the gallows. Some of them, indeed, were not quite so sure but that they would have to swing as it was. The only loophole of escape left them was by their destroying all evidence against them, and that meant wiping out Tapper and his party. When they thought about their absent comrade Poddy, it was doubtless to hope that he had fulfilled the grim mission with which he had been entrusted, and was now on his way back to them. He might have got temporarily lost, which would account for his delay. They would want all their available aids, even though they believed that two of the enemy—Little Dog and Jim—were now no longer on the strength of the enemy's forces.

Tapper and Little Dog, now that they were clear of the hornet's nest, left the valley and made towards the ravine where they had left the others. A couple of hours' sharp walking and they reached it. It was now daylight, and the world looked very grey and cold. As they followed up the tortuous channel overshadowed by high overhanging wooded cliffs, they became conscious of unusual sounds proceeding from the

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camp. They could hear the voices of the boys raised excitedly with an occasional laugh; and every now and again a loud spasmodic guffaw that suggested the rumble and crackle of distant thunder. Two minutes more and they were challenged by Big Head. They rounded a bend, and a remarkable sight presented itself.

At the entrance to the level and arena-like camping-ground, which was free of all obstacles and carpeted with the softest and greenest turf, Big Head stood on guard with his rifle at the ready. In the centre of the open space that suggested an ideal picnicking spot, the boys and Poddy, doubtless to mitigate their irksome and anxious wait and to keep themselves warm at the same time, were indulging in a game that seemed to be a compromise between cricket and baseball. In front of three improvised wickets of wolf-willow stood Mr. Poddy, wagging a huge club in his hands after the manner of a professional batsman. He was in his shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbows, his hatless head showed his magnificent crop of hair to its fullest advantage, and his strongly marked and massive features fairly glowed with exertion and enthusiasm. Peter Dick was bowling his fiercest overhand, and Poddy was swiping at the balls with a grim

ferocity that showed how dreadfully in earnest he was. Whenever he hit the ball over against the cliff, he would shoulder his club and, emitting lion-like growls the while, dash frantically backwards and forwards from the wicket to a certain fixed point with amazing swiftness for a man of his size. If ever a man seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself it was Mr. Poddy. Neither Jim who was wicket-keeping, but who had again and again failed to stump the artful batsman, nor Peter Dick who bowled, could manage to get the sportive ex-desperado out. As for Big Head, although he doubtless also enjoyed the spectacle, he evinced the liveliest contempt for the whole proceedings, and, with his huge aquiline nose cocked in air, expressed his surprise and disapproval by a series of guttural "Ough, oughs!" Nevertheless, whenever Poddy hit the ball and started to run, Big Head invariably pointed his rifle at him and followed him with his right eye and gun-barrel from one wicket to the other, as if under the impression that the ragged big man meditated a dash for liberty. In his secret heart Big Head was sorry he refrained from doing this, as his bones still kept hurting owing to the fall Poddy had given him.

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Mr. Tapper and Little Dog stood still to watch the remarkable cricket match. The players were much too engrossed to notice them.

"Now then, Mr. Poddy, play!" cried Peter Dick, and sent a sharp overhand ball into him.

"Whoosh!" cried the giant; and with a mighty sweep of his club that ought to have sent an unimpeded ball at least as high as the Cross on St. Paul's, and from there as far as the Shot Tower on the other side of the Thames, he swiped the ball high up into the air and almost to the top of the cliff. Then Mr. Poddy, with one hand doing the work that a belt ought to have done, and with the other carrying his club, threw back his head and, with his great beard streaming on either side of him, ran from one wicket to another as if his life depended on it.

"Four!" he yelled, or rather gasped, before he again came to a dead stop at the wicket from which he had started. "Cricky, if this don't beat draughts holler!"

Again he stamped and shifted his feet in front of the wicket, and waggled his improvised bat in professional style, and shouted "Play" so loudly that one would have imagined the bowler was quite a mile and a half away.

Peter Dick looked very determined, and with

a little preliminary run, sent in another ball. Again the batsman set his teeth and met it in workmanlike style. But this time the ball hit a rock and bounded from it into Peter's hands, who, turning with it quickly, found the perspiring Poddy half-way between the wickets. Mr. Poddy, seeing that his case was hopeless, promptly stopped and turned his broad back to Peter Dick who, as if to emphasise his victory, let him have the ball right between the shoulder-blades.

"Out!" cried Peter Dick.

"You little cuss!" cried Poddy, trying to get at the injured part, but still grinning. Then he threw down his club, turned sharply, caught up the bowler in his two hands, and before Peter Dick knew what was happening he found himself tossed at least ten or twelve feet into the air. But Mr. Poddy meant no harm, and caught him again as easily and deftly as if he had been a child's doll. He then replaced him gently on the ground and roared until the ravine rang again. Fortunately for Poddy, although he never knew it, Big Head, mistaking the nature of the incident, was about to let him have the contents of his rifle, when some one got in the way and thus averted a tragedy. Then Tapper and Little Dick came forward.

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"Good morning, all of you!" cried the former.
"Sorry to interrupt your game, but we must get breakfast at once. Little Dog and I have seen Redfish and his gang, and I've made up my mind to interview them again, and fight them if need be. Poddy, after what I have told you, and what you have said, and what I have seen, will you fight on our side?"

"S'help me, I will! I swears it on—on that there draughtboard and men," exclaimed the big man in a manner that admitted of no doubt.

"Then that's settled, Poddy. We'll shake hands on it, and after breakfast we'll tackle the enemy, though it's two to one."

And now to return to John Thorne himself. When on the previous day he had, on trying to escape, run right into the arms of the enemy, he had made a brave fight for it. It was, however, of no avail, and it is fairly certain the kidnappers would have despatched him then and there, only they knew that in the end his life would have to be accounted for, and the charge sheet against them was already sufficiently heavy. Had they not distrusted one another, John Thorne would certainly have been a dead man. They contented themselves with handling him roughly, and gener-

ally abusing him. They now blamed Redfish for all their troubles.

That night, or rather morning, after Tapper had made his unsuccessful attempt to rescue him, great was the confusion and pandemonium that reigned in the cave. There were mutual recriminations, and the blackguard crew were on the point of fighting it out amongst themselves. But some of them had sallied out after Tapper, and when they returned matters had quieted down somewhat. A stormy council of war was then held. It was decided that they must attack the leech-like pursuers before another twenty-four hours had elapsed.

When daylight came Redfish showed better generalship than most people would have given him credit for. He split up his party into two portions. The one with which he travelled made no attempt at concealment—indeed, seemed to court observation—and made towards the divide that separated them from the Saskatchewan River while the other made a detour and travelled parallel to it, doubtless keeping well out of sight and taking good care to pass over stony ground where their tracks would not be observed, at the same time guarding against surprise. The intention of the kidnappers was, of course, to lu

Tapper's party to the high precipitous banks of the Saskatchewan River, where there would be no retreat when the concealed party suddenly came out of hiding and closed in upon them. For some reason best known to himself, Redfish came alongside Thorne and acquainted him with his intentions.

"I think you must be mad," said Thorne quietly. "I can't conceive any sane man behaving as you do. If you had only run straight you would have had pretty well all you are courting the gallows for now. Anyhow, how can you expect to succeed in your schemes with such a pack at your heels? If you secured a million of money to-morrow, the men you have with you would hunt you to the uttermost ends of the earth in order to blackmail you."

Redfish looked uneasy, and answered in an apparently flippant way, which, however, did not deceive his prisoner.

"Pooh! that's the usual cant!" he exclaimed. "In this world it's every man for himself and the dickens take the hindmost. Look at them in certain parts of the world we needn't mention, how they lie to and elbow one another in order to grow rich. If they troubled much about 'commercial morality,' as I've heard you

term it, they wouldn't have many dollars to the credit."

"If you can prove to me," rejoined Thorne, "that the money gained in the way you speak of makes these men any the happier, then I'll believe there's something in what you say. The man who makes money dishonestly carries about the canker with him that makes money a curse. If you had a million to-morrow, your fate would be a foregone conclusion."

Redfish laughed uneasily. Thorne could see he was meditating some move.

"You haven't a very flattering opinion of me," said Redfish, "and I'll admit appearances have been against me; but your notions of commercial morality are out of date. This is the age of Trusts."

"Then it's God help the widow and the orphan," rejoined the rancher. "Give that sort of thing rein, and it means the end of everything—chaos."

Redfish grinned in a superior way. Mr. Thorne realised he was only wasting his breath talking about principle to a man to whom it was only a meaningless term. Rogues, no matter how clever they may be in one direction, always lack men's foresight in another. They are too blind even

realise that honesty as a policy is an all-round sound one.

"I admit one's plans sometimes miscarry," commented Redfish. "Between ourselves, I've had a good deal more trouble over this business than I at first anticipated. But I still hold the trump card—yourself, of course—and I'm willing to make a bargain with you."

"You hope and believe that I would stick to a bargain, although you suggest that in ordinary dealing there is no necessity to observe commercial morality?"

"You are one of the old-fashioned sort a man can count on when once you have given your word," replied Redfish. "I admit the system has its advantages."

"You are one of those smart, short-sighted fools who can only be made to understand a truth when it is brought home to you," retorted the rancher hotly. "But you say you have a proposal to make. What about your mates?"

Redfish did not seem to relish the word "mates" as applied to his associates.

"Oh, those chaps!" he sneered. "Do you think I consider them my mates?"

"They are your mates, no matter what you consider them," said Thorne. "But I've no wish

to prolong this conversation. What is it you propose?"

"That you promise to pay me ten thousand pounds within one month from to-day, or at least as soon as you can handle the money you are certain to raise from those oil-wells. You see, I intend to be magnanimous and suppress some of those documents you signed for me. That you promise to say nothing, and do nothing, to get me into trouble. That you shall account to the authorities for your absence in a plausible way which I will indicate to you. And in consideration of which I undertake to take you clean away out of the hands of these fellows and land you safe at Pasqua within the next few days. I will also undertake never to trouble you again."

"Your touching faith in my promises is very flattering, considering the value you put on promises generally," observed the rancher. "You're one of those inconsistent ones who expect to find everything in this world fashioned so as to suit your own particular case. According to your doctrine, if I promise to do as you wish me to, and then break that promise, I'll only be doing what a sensible man would do. But it is no use arguing with you. Do I understand you to say

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"You surely wouldn't be sorry for them?" said Redfish.

"You are a lower down fellow than even I took you for," cried Thorne hotly. "I've got a good mind to tell your mates what you propose."

"I'll shoot you down on the spot if you utter a word." Redfish glanced anxiously around. "And lower your voice, can't you? The beggars may hear us!"

As Mr. Thorne had no desire to be shot, and seeing that even if he did expose Redfish to his followers it was not at all unlikely that some one would take the opportunity of shooting him in the wholesale murder that must ensue, he refrained from telling any further home truths. He made up his mind to bide his time, which surely could not be long delayed.

But the present tactics of the kidnappers troubled him. He wondered if it was possible the rescue party could be deceived by them, and fall into the trap which had evidently been projected. But he thought of Mr. Tapper's wide experience, and comforted himself with the thought that it was extremely unlikely his friend was the sort of man to be taken in by them. Besides,

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Tapper had Indians with him, who were sure to keep a sharp look-out against a possible surprise. Still, it was evident that Redfish meditated some unexpected movement which might puzzle the pursuers and leave them in the lurch. He was too astute a general to take even his own men into his confidence.

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CHAPTER XXXIII

THE ATTACK

It was a desperate and dangerous move that Tapper now meditated, to give battle to the kidnappers. But there was no other course open if John Thorne was to be saved. Indeed, there was no saying but that Redfish and his villains, now that they realised their schemes were discovered and were bound to spell disaster, would in revenge compass their unfortunate prisoner's death. There were many ways of doing this without actually committing themselves. Their first attempt had failed, owing to the two men whom they had left to do it distrusting each other. Their obvious course would now be either to wipe out all evidence against them by exterminating Tapper and his party, or to make straight for the States where they could disperse and avoid pursuit. That they would adopt the latter course was almost certain.

Poddy was now given a rifle, and though it seemed a good deal to expect that that gentleman

would turn upon his late comrades, still Tapper was an astute judge of human nature, and after a short conversation with the giant brigand of careless habits, he knew he could depend upon him—at least so far as he had him directly under his own observation. Tapper explained to Poddy that Redfish and his gang, now more than suspecting him, would make short work of him if he attempted to go back to them. That settled the matter, and Poddy now remembered that he had one or two little differences to put right with his late fellow-robbers, more particularly with the man who had given him the gratuitous cold bath. Poddy had now developed a slight cold in consequence, and he felt that having made the delinquent swallow tea-leaves and soap-suds was hardly sufficient punishment.

Three hours later they stood on the brink of a cliff commanding a view of the cave where the kidnappers had been visited by Tapper on the previous night. They were just in time to see them making their way southward across a plateau three or four miles distant.

All that day they followed them up, keeping well out of sight, and sending the Indians out scouting on either hand to avert the possibility of being ambushed. Poddy was a pleasant sur-

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prise to the party. He insisted on loading himself with the entire camping paraphernalia, and seemed rather pleased than otherwise when Peter Dick said that he resembled the noble ship of the desert. Poddy did not associate ships with camels.

As a reward, and at Poddy's earnest request, when they stopped at noon to have a brief rest Jim gave his one-time enemy his revenge at draughts, and, by persistingly thinking of something else all the time he was playing, contrived to allow his opponent to win the game. This put the big man in the best of humours with himself. He even went so far as to wink pleasantly to Big Head, who, however, felt rather alarmed by this than otherwise.

By nightfall the kidnappers were still pushing due south, and the boys were feeling the strain of the rapid travelling.

For two hours only that night did Redfish and his gang camp, and when the moon rose they were toiling up the watershed, to the west of where they had gone down the great chute. Midnight, and they were on the summit of the divide. When morning broke they were wearily letting themselves down on the other side. When the sun rose they once more beheld the great gleaming stretches of the lordly Saskatchewan. A brief

pause was made for breakfast, and then the desperadoes made the top of the high north bank of the broad river, and began to follow it down. Every one now felt thoroughly tired, but they knew that the enemy must be in the same plight and that unless they managed to bring them to book before they reached their boats, they would slip across, travel due south, and out of the country.

But the rapid retreat of Redfish and his gang had been a ruse. The enemy was aware that the smaller party was following, and therefore determined to tire them out before getting them to a suitable spot on the banks of the Saskatchewan where they could corner and shoot them down at their leisure. But Tapper had also foreseen such a probable ending to the great mock retreat, and he calculated that such a course would suit him just as well as any other, so that when the enemy made a sudden detour and, flanking, drove them on to a precipitous peninsula, he was ready for them and retreated towards the rugged point.

"Now, boys," he said cheerily, as already a few shots at long range began to whistle around them "as soon as we get to a place narrow enough for us to command the peninsula, we'll make a stand and entrench ourselves. I'll show you how. I

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helped to keep the old flag flying some few years ago outside Wepener, along with fifteen hundred men and six guns, when De Wet and Grobelaar and De la Ray, with eight thousand Boers and sixteen guns, did their level best for eighteen days to knock spots out of us. And it was all due to the way good old Brabant and Dalgetty taught us how to play the Boers at their own game, and to go one better, that we gave them fits and knocked out ten men to their one every time they tried to rush us. Hurrah ! here's the spot. Now string across and build yourselves little *schanzes*,¹ and don't show more than your noses if you can help it."

There was a little dip and a good many loose stones right across the base of the point, and on the crest of that Tapper showed the boys how to build a *schanze* or shield against the bullets. This was simply done by erecting a low semi-circular wall of loose stones. It takes very little indeed to change the course of a bullet.

And now the boys had a taste of what a fight is like under modern conditions, although, fortunately, this one was without the aid of artillery to shower down death-dealing shrapnel, or lyddite guns to pound away at the rocks and splinter

¹ Stone walls.

them into road metal, while filling the air with noxious fumes to stifle man and beast.

Regarding one's impressions when for the first time under fire, a good deal of truth and a good deal of nonsense has been written. As some one said about tales of adventure generally, "Those who know don't write, and those who write don't know," a statement which contains, as has been said, some truth. Of course, one hardly includes under the heading of adventure a pot shot or two whereby some sniper has made an easy-going and perhaps wool-gathering soldier perspire freely when the only thing the latter can possibly be troubling about is to show his concealed foe a clean pair of heels—the only feasible course.

The sort of thing meant is when one hears the awakening rattle and roll of musketry, the growing boom of the big guns, and the irregular and nerve-racking bark of pom-poms and other quick-firing guns. And when, in addition to all that, one gets the order to advance—not at a gallop or a trot, but dismounted and with the necessity of keeping cool and using one's judgment, so as to find a spot good cover and make a break for it at the right moment. Or, perhaps, one has got to lie still, cowering like a hare or a rabbit in the long grass on the brow of a hill, or some other

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open space, and await the deliberate advance of an enemy, while over one's head, with a disconcerting whistle and wail, Mauser bullet and shell go hurtling before they have found the correct range. All this is a different story, for one has time to think, and perhaps one thinks a good deal harder then than on almost any other occasion.

To Tapper the whistle of flying bullets was nothing new. The sound of them struck upon him with an odd familiarity, and one of those minute records, thousands of them doubtless stored away in the most admirable order in some minute and specialised brain cell, became instinct with life and rehearsed to the controller of the complex seat of thought an incident that probably he had forgotten all about till that moment. The conditions he was now under were so similar in many ways that it had been comparatively easy to imagine himself back in South Africa. He looked at the boys on either side of him. The mental picture he had been indulging in seemed strangely applicable to the present situation.

"Jim and Peter," he cried firmly, "you mustn't show yourselves round corners. If you should have to do it, be very, very careful, and don't waste time over it. What we've got to do is to protect ourselves. It seems to me they're waking up.

I think we'd better build some bigger stones into our *schanzes*."

Ping, ping, ping; whiz, ping, zip! zip! went the bullets of the enemy, and men and boys worked as hard as, perhaps, they ever did in their lives to build their little shields of stone. Poddy found them invaluable, and the giant, at considerable personal risk, carried huge stones for Jim and Peter to help build their shields. Luckily the little hollow stood them in good stead, and they worked with comparative safety, doubtless much to the surprise of the enemy.

Tapper occupied the middle position in the front of some seventy odd yards; the boys were some ten yards from him on either side, the Indians on either side again, and Poddy occupied the extreme right under the watchful eye of Little Dog. But never once in that desperate fight had the Indian cause to suspect his late foe. The ex-kidnapper was too intent in looking for the man who had given him the gratuitous cold bath to think of treachery. He was also a dead shot, as some of his late fellow-conspirators found to their cost.

Little Dog was silently enjoying himself after his own peculiar fashion. Big Head, as has been said, was too fully occupied in keeping one eye

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on the enemy and another on Poddy alongside him to think of the bullets; while as for the boys, though at first the sharp crackle of the rifles and the whistle and zip of the bullets made them feel just a little queer with a sense of the swift death that was all around them, they soon warmed to the work of looking out for a peeping head, and sometimes a foeman making a hurried dash from one point of vantage to another.

As for Mr. Tapper, he seemed now to be easier in his mind than he had been at any period of their trip. He shouted instructions cheerily to the others, and exchanged pleasantries with the various members of the party. One thing only was he strict about, that no one should carelessly expose himself. There was a vast difference, he said, between bravery and rashness, for the latter had nothing of bravery in it, but only argued want of brains.

That the kidnappers did not lack courage of a kind was obvious. Slowly and surely they took point after point and advanced on the little band of besieged ones. That two or three of them had received wounds was obvious. On one occasion, when one of the enemy incautiously showed too much of his head and shoulders from behind a rock, Tapper's rifle cracked at the

same moment, and a bulky form lurched forward into view. Two of his comrades were then seen to make for him, evidently with the intention of pulling him out of harm's way; but Little Doc and Big Head, not recognising anything in the shape of Red Cross privileges with men who were simply bent on murder, stopped them short with wounds of a more or less serious character.

Up till now not one of the defenders had received a scratch, thanks largely to the cool-headed and cautious leadership of Tapper. Still the latter knew the desperate character of some of the men who fought against them, and he realised it was only a question of time before they got near enough to rush the position. Nor had Tapper long to wait. Suddenly he cried:

"Now, boys, they are going to attempt a rush. Keep cool; don't expose yourselves more than you can help; and don't waste a shot!"

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CHAPTER XXXIV

A FIGHT TO THE FINISH

ON came the attackers with a hardihood that in another cause would have reflected the greatest credit on them. They darted from rock to rock, or anything that would afford the slightest cover, firing as they came. Jim felt his right ear nipped as if some one had applied a red-hot wire to it, and Peter Dick's hat went spinning into the air—near shaves both.

"Steady, lads, and let them have it!"

It was Tapper who spoke, and he set the example by emptying the magazine of his rifle. The kidnapper in the lead, and who had just started forward at a run, threw up his hands and pitched forward all of a heap with a bullet through his brain.

But the others still came on, and it would certainly have gone hard with the defenders of the point had not at that moment the sound of distant firing and faint hurrahs caused both attacked and attackers alike to pause and listen. Were the latter being reinforced?

"Hooray, boys!" cried Tapper. "It's the Mounted Police. Look at them coming over the bench¹ yonder! They'll be here in a few minutes. Let those beggars have it!"

But "those beggars" had had enough, and now all they thought about was to make themselves scarce. They made for a hillside at some little distance, and at the foot of which there was a chaos of huge boulders. Amongst these they scuttled like so many iguanas.

"Now then, comrades, after them; but look out for yourselves. Give them a chance to throw up their hands."

Next moment the besieged had left cover and were after the fleeing kidnappers, some of whom were seen to throw away their rifles in their eagerness to make good their escape. But the Mounted Police with their splendid horses came thundering on and cut off their retreat. Jim and Peter tried to keep up with Mr. Tapper, but the gentleman, with something evidently in his eye, soon outdistanced them, and made for a little group he saw hurrying away behind some rocks where the ground sloped towards the river again. Jim and Peter were now close together, and running for all they were worth, when a shot fired

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from behind a huge rock, and just missing Peter's head, made them change their course. Peter dashed round the rock in one direction with his rifle at the ready, and Jim ran round in the other. The latter ran right into a hatless and coatless man, who, with his rifle raised, was waiting for Peter coming round the other way. Jim was too close to him to fire, but he dealt him a blow on the side of the head with the butt-end of his Winchester that bore him to earth. His would-be executioner's rifle was jerked from his hands, but next moment he had struggled to his knees again, and was looking around for a means of escape. And then his eyes rested on Jim's face. The recognition was mutual. The enemy was Redfish!

The kidnapper glared at Jim wildly for a moment, and then, as he realised that the lad whom he had fiendishly caused to be tied up and left to perish in a walled-up cave stood before him, either in the spirit or the flesh, he uttered an inarticulate cry and fell senseless.

"You see, he didn't exactly expect to see me again," observed Jim as he knelt down to place his prisoner in a more comfortable position. "Fetch some water in the crown of my hat, Peter, for I see you've lost yours. Look, there's a spring over there. I'll take his knife and fire-

arms away. If harm has come to my uncle, he will want careful looking after."

Two Mounted Policemen rode up at that moment, and at sight of the prostrate man, jumped off their horses.

"The very man we've been looking for!" one of them explained to Jim. "Well, he won't require handcuffs till he comes to. He's a foxy looking chap and no mistake. But you're wanted over there by Mr. Tapper. He's found a friend of yours, and unless you hurry up he'll bring down the rain shouting for you. Goodness, what lung he has!"

And, sure enough, at that moment they heard a series of weird shouts that suggested some fresh horror of civilisation in the shape of a combined steam-siren and motor-horn.

Jim and Peter hurried off in the direction indicated, and as they ran they noted ample evidence of the complete rout of the enemy. Three of them lay prostrate on the ground, evidently badly wounded, while two or three more, looking grim and dishevelled, were being led handcuffed to an open space guarded by troopers. One or two of them seemed still to be giving trouble and objected to the handcuffs, but these fastidious miscreants got little sympathy from their smart

guards, who handled them as easily as if they had been children.

As the boys rounded a low ridge at the foot of which was a black, stagnant pool, they beheld a strange sight. A huge man with his back to them, and whom they recognised as Poddy by his immense crop of hair and the dingy and ragged condition of his wardrobe generally, stood on the marshy edge of it holding a struggling man face downwards in front of him. The boys hailed him. Poddy, however, paid no attention to them, and addressed his victim.

"Said I was a dirty bloke, you did!" he exclaimed; "and tried to plug me when I give you a chance to put up your dirty hands! Told me oncet to go and wash my face, did you, and tipped me into the creek! Waal now, here's for old times!"

And struggling, Poddy flung the wretched man, who was Morris, *alias* Mons, headlong into the black, slimy pool.

But Mr. Poddy was interrupted, for at that moment two Mounted Policemen appearing upon the scene promptly covered him with their rifles, and one of them produced a pair of handcuffs.

"Bill Poddy, my friend," said the one with the corporal's stripes, "I warned you a year ago of

the dangers of keeping bad company, and you turned a deaf ear. It grieves me to do it, but hold out your lily-white hands."

In as few words as possible Jim explained how Poddy had really been their friend and fought on their side, and evidently glad enough to do it, the policeman allowed the one-time suspect to go, and went off in search of more prisoners.

In two minutes more Jim and Peter approached the little group where an officer of Mounted Police stood with Tapper and a spare, grey-haired man whose face bore traces of recent privation and anxiety. He was John Thorne, and Tapper had made short work of his guard, who had meditated walking him over the brink of the cliff in order to get rid of him for good and all.

"Jim," said the stranger as he came forward and shook hands, "you're like what your father was, my boy. And to think that we should meet like this!"

But that was all he trusted himself to say just then, and he greeted Peter Dick in silence.

Then Tapper spoke to the Police Inspector, doubtless as much to distract attention from the meeting as aught else. He said:

"What I can't make out, Irwin, is why you led me to understand that you believed what that

villain Redfish told you, and immediately afterwards followed us all up with a troop of Police."

"I never did believe Redfish," was the quiet reply, "and I had been watching his game for some considerable time. It would never do for a Police force to make its plans known. That Redfish did act sooner than we expected I'll admit, but we were never more than a couple of days behind you at any time, and that was only because we couldn't exactly take our horses short cuts down water-chutes, you know. We had to go a long way round about. Now, when we've seen to the prisoners, we'll make for Pasqua."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE DISCOMFITURE OF ROGUES

It took longer to get ready for Pasqua than even the officer of Mounted Police had anticipated, for there was the wounded to see to, as well as other things to be done. Indeed, night had fallen before their work was completed. The fastidious Redfish, either by design or accident, was securely handcuffed to his pet aversion, the huge Hungarian called Morris, *alias* Mons, who had once upon a time posed as a doctor, and who was the dirtiest and most unsavoury villain of the lot. It would have been a ridiculous sight had it not been a humiliating one, to note how the coarser-grained rascal seemed to derive a melancholy satisfaction in taunting and mortifying his ex-leader and comrade in misfortune.

This man, when Redfish was in power, had been one of the most obedient and plausible of the whole gang. Though despising Redfish for his lack of stability and absence of fair dealing with even his own comrades, he had yet thought that

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if he could only keep on the right side of him by warning him against some of his mates, he, Redfish, might in return favour him when disposing of the plunder. He had therefore suppressed his naturally discontented and fault-finding proclivities to fawn and humiliate himself before the man who in his heart he detested and despised—as even rogues can despise. Now, when he found that his leader had allowed himself to be trapped by one white man, two boys, and two Indians, his mortification and futile rage almost affected his reason. Despite the vigilance of the troopers and his own sufferings, he jerked Redfish's manacled wrist about so, and expressed his opinion as to his late leader's lack of foresight in such condemnatory and insulting terms, that the troopers momentarily expected they would fly at each other's throats. As, however, they would be less likely to give trouble by attempting escape, and it was all in the way of retributive justice, the specious alien, though checked, was not separated from his fallen idol.

It was found that the wounded would in all probability recover. They would be kept on the banks of the Saskatchewan until boats were brought up from Pasqua, when they would be embarked and speedily taken downstream to that point.

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Before it grew dark camp was pitched some five hundred yards from the scene of the fight. It was heartening for Tapper and the boys to think that now their hardships and dangers were over, and, above all, that they had succeeded in accomplishing the object of their great trip.

John Thorne had a long chat with Jim, and there was much to talk about. It seemed strange that a man who must have come through an extremely trying and arduous experience should prefer to be told about all the commonplace doings of home, rather than recount the far more important happenings which must have constituted his life of late. But John Thorne, despite his natural shrewdness, was a simple-minded man; one of those rare characters unspoiled by success, which is perhaps the greatest test of true nobility. Too often, unfortunately, does the self-made man lose sight of the fact that, after all, nature must have endowed him with the necessary perseverance and quality of mind to battle successfully with adverse circumstances.

It was very obvious there was no swollen head about John Thorne. He was as polite and considerate to the lowest servant in his employ as he would have been to the Lieutenant-Governor

of the North-West Territories. And John Thorne was anything but a fool.

It was necessary that the Inspector of Mounted Police should be made acquainted with all the facts of the extraordinary attempt to kidnap or kill him, so later on in the evening, when that gentleman, Mr. Thorne, Mr. Tapper, and the two boys sat round the camp-fire in a sheltered nook alongside the cliff, he hinted that, if the rancher felt equal to the task, he would be glad to hear his story for his future guidance.

It was then that the facts which have been duly set down in this narrative were made known.

That night, for the first time since their arrival in the country, Jim and Peter lay down to rest with light and untroubled hearts. The great quest was happily ended, and the villainy of the rogues who had endeavoured to work such ruin had been brought to naught. Most important of all, the life of a good man had been saved. Theirs had been a stirring and tragic introduction to the great North-West, but in the end they would be none the worse for that. It would keep them from any romantic and futile hankering in that direction. And what a story they would have to tell when they wrote home! But it was more than likely that as soon as they

returned to Pasqua the news of Redfish's roguery, of the great conspiracy, and their share in helping to defeat it, would be flashed along the telegraph wires to the Old Country, and the gist of their extraordinary adventures would be known at home before they could sit down to write them. They had passed through an anxious and trying time, but, as Mr. Tapper said, they had stuck to their guns, and victory was theirs in the end.

Next morning they were all early astir, and the boys and Tapper with the officer of Mounted Police followed down the great river, leaving the others behind with the prisoners and the wounded. Next evening they were opposite Pasqua, and were towed across by the cable ferry. Immediately boats were despatched up the river to bring the others down.

It was a memorable experience for Jim and Peter to re-enter the little township from which they had made such a troubled and sudden exit a comparatively short time before. It was a matter for considerable reflection and thanksgiving for the man who had been the victim of such a bold and iniquitous outrage. Needless to say, he took up the reins of possession and occupation again without further trouble. Such of Redfish's gang as had been left by that rogue in possession

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had fled on the first rumours of their leader's disaster.

Redfish and his confederates were ultimately tried for their crimes, and are now convicts undergoing long terms of imprisonment at Stony Mountain Penitentiary, Manitoba. The oil-wells, of course, remained in the hands of John Thorne, and developed into a magnificent property. Jim and Peter and Mr. Tapper are very largely interested in them, and it is to be hoped they will come successfully through that most crucial of all tests, prosperity. As for Mr. Poddy, some eminent medical men took an interest in his case, with the result that inside six months he became quite another man, and a very presentable one at that. He still plays cricket, but will not as much as mention chess or draughts, a consummation for which both Jim and Peter are profoundly thankful. Mr. Poddy has a good position at the oil-wells, and his only peculiarity now consists in his persisting in digging one in the ribs with an enormous thumb when he has said anything funny. And yet he wonders why people seem to avoid him when he shows symptoms of being in a jocular mood. He is the leader of the Hatless Brigade in the province of Saskatchewan, and bald-headed men viewing his magnificent crop of

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hair ascribe his attitude to vanity, and deride the movement which, after all, is the oldest, sanest, and most sanitary fashion in existence.

Little Dog now owns more ponies than he can properly look after, seeing he has his work cut out keeping a brotherly eye on his friend Big Head, who, since his famous trip, has given himself more airs than ever. Indeed, to hear Big Head recount to a new chum how once upon a time his favourite way of killing a bull-moose was to drop from the branch of a tree on to its neck and, after taking short rides upon it just by way of amusement, to despatch it, is something to be remembered. He, however, never tells such stories in the presence of Little Dog.

THE END

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